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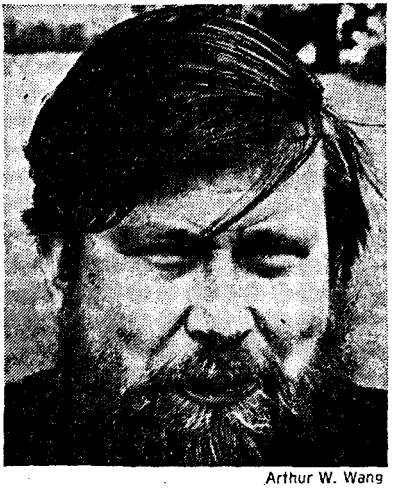

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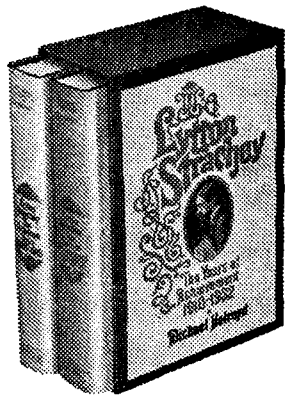


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## NOTES

**"Superworm"** is the first chapter of **GEORGE DEAUX's** novel, **Superworm,** to be published this spring by Simon and Schuster. Mr. Deaux, a young American writer in his thirties, has published two previous novels and is in Tangier this year. . . . **ROBERT COLE's** latest book is **Children of Crisis.** . . . **IVANHOE DONALDSON** is a Fellow with the Institute for Policy Studies and **PAUL FELDMAN** is Publications Coordinator of the LID. . . . **CHARLES V. HAMILTON,** chairman of the department of Political Science at Roosevelt University, is presently working with independent black candidates for public office in Chicago. . . . **ABBIE HOFFMAN** is working on a Festival of Life to take place in Chicago during the Democratic Convention. "A gigantic free music, dramatic and artistic presentation will be offered as a living alternative to the theater of death," he tells us. His **Revolution for the Hell of It,** will be published by Dial this fall. . . . **TOM KAHN** is Executive Director of the LID and is working with Bayard Rustin on a book on the civil rights movement. . . . Doubleday published **dem** by **WILLIAM MELVIN KELLEY** last fall. Mr. Kelley is now living in Paris. . . . **NOMAN MAILER's Armies of the Night** is coming out this spring. . . . **JACK NEWFIELD** is working on a biography of Bobby Kennedy. Last year, he tells us, he refused to pay 23 per cent of his taxes in protest against the Vietnam war. . . . **FRED POWLEDGE** is a

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George Deaux

# SUPERWORM

It was an ordinary barbershop. Between a bar and a health food store. Sign in the window says, "If your hair is unbecoming to you, you should Be Coming to Us." Beneath the sign, lined up on a ledge along the bottom of the window, are the usual dusty snake plants, dog-eared magazines, rusty cans of shoe polish, faded cards advertising tonics and lotions. A bell attached by a spring to the top of the door jangles when you walk in, and the first-chair barber-owner bows slightly and greets you with an ordinary "Hiya fella. Howya doin'?" The other barbers smile: tall thin man and chunky young dude, dressed in white up to their chins, holding delicately aloft the stainless steel tools of the trade. The mirrors front and back are set at slight angles to record reflections into dim expanses of distance. Cards of plastic combs. Boxes and cans of powder. A limp brush standing on its handle like a sick palm tree. The three swivel chairs — leather and steel and porcelain. The marble counter. Pink sterilizer box. Brass spittoon. Shoeshine smells. The three customers and one waiting, reclined, lounging in the mid-morning comfort of, as only an executive or a salesman or a mad avenger can, being free to leave the desk before lunchtime.

The professor in the third chair seems calm enough, as ordinary a customer as the neatly combed executive at the window, the red-faced salesman in the center, or the high-school pimple waiting his turn among the magazines. In many ways he is an ordinary man, if not today an ordinary customer: he is middle-aged, in good health, a family man, a professional man, a property owner, a veteran, a voter, even a concerned voter, a reader of books and magazines (he carries a copy of the *New York Review of Books* in his coat pocket),

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a TV viewer: everything you could hope for. He does not look like a leaper or any other kind of maniac, nor does this look like the place you'd expect a leaping to occur; it is not, after all, the U.N., or Wall Street, or the halls of Congress, or the Pentagon. It is a barbershop in Philadelphia. But this is 1967, this is the year when otherwise sane middle-aged men, even here, began to grow beards and steal hub caps, were troubled themselves about their symptoms, but felt nonetheless the need to leap. And this professor — so ordinary he look above the white sheet and tissue paper collar — who announces truly (the truth will always fool 'em, best cover story in the world) that he is a prof. "Yes, just a college prof in the city for a haircut." Who knows but us — if we could but see beneath that sheet! — that he is really a hero-professor, an imaginary nigger–sheeny-wop-spick? Drive a black car park ready at the curb. Wear (under his fine academic-casual togs) his secret Worm Suit, his black tights and his Worm belt and other super-secret gear. He is waiting to unbutton and set right all this, all this *fat*.

He been a long time talking. Voting. Marching. Now he's in his secret underwear. Getting ready he gonna leap, they don't watch out in here.

"Thatcher car park there inna no parking zone?" the barber asks him. Theirs is the third chair, beside the white porcelain basin, the red tubes, strange rubber scalp massage devices like enormous French ticklers. The barber is young, plump and waxy, his own hair greased in a ducktail, curled down his forehead, look like pink syrup been injected under the skin of his cheeks. He is flamboyant, proud of his skill, competitive, tough, snaps the scissors dramatically in the air, sometimes too close to the professor's ear, testing his nerve, can you take it how tough I am?

"Yes," the professor answered, "the black one." He is tempted to add: Black like a worm. Like vengeance.

The barber snorted violently. Rattled. Clearing his throat. He's saying, "You gonna get a ticket sure as hell. Park like that."

He shrugged. Not worried about parking tickets today, although in the past he was a model citizen. This professor — Claude Flowers, but now the Worm in mufti (the disguise disguised) — is a mild–mannered gentleman. He wears wire-rimmed spectacles. He wears tweed. He fights off a tendency to paunchiness with isometrics and

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light weight training. He is forty-four years old and he has come to fear lately that his face is getting puffy. Still he has something of the look of a younger man. His hair is cut in the English style, rather long over the ears and in back, and, although it is beginning to get gray, it is still quite full — where it has receded over the temples he combs it loosely and you hardly notice that it's thin. He wears Clark's desert boots and Rooster ties, and shirts with buttondown collars. Although today his jacket and trousers match, that is not usually the case.

This is a man who, until recently, has had hope. He grew up with hope, married in hope, left to fight Our Nation's enemies in hope, returned to find his wife run off with a chiropractor, but still hoping, married again, raised a family on hope and the G.I. Bill, taught in hope, and once in that famous time went to Washington to serve Government in hope. Now he is having his hair cut in a kind of despair. Hope now is all in his secret costume, his clever underwear, and in his mission to Make Them See the Light by Leaping. He don't reveal this to no man, being as he in disguise (underneath the tweed, he is black, black!). But he laying low in there, still hoping somehow.

"Black car show the dirt, black does," the barber says.

Is he a country boy? Claude wonders. From the land of dust and mud. Does he know we are being poisoned? Even suspect what they are doing?

Thinks Claude Flowers, this professor-avenger. How does he come to be here, a country boy, in the midst of this reaction? Barbershops, Claude is convinced, are the American equivalent of Munich beerhalls. In truth, he always cuts his own hair, except today, when he enters the enemy camp. Gonna leap on the bastards if he can't reason with them. He's chosen this shop because it smelled of wrong-thinking all the way into the street. His nose, sensitive to evil, slammed on the brakes and broke out the Worm gear the instant it had felt the fetid wave of wrong thought.

Under the sheet he flicks his thumb to make the little balls of hair jump up and scatter. He worked on one trying to push it back up over his belly, up his chest, back up there. The great man and his heroic never-ending labor. It came apart and he says, "Not in the city it doesn't."

"What's that, professor?"

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"In the country where there's a lot of dust a black car shows the dirt, but not in the city."

"Huh?"

But the dead have blown away and up his nose. He twitch and he sneeze.

"You gotta watch that. I knew this guy he die just like that. Inhale hair it punch holes in your lung and man you're done for. Old Indian trick. Whiskers from a tiger. Kill you quick by it punch holes in your lung. That's a India type Indian."

The professor blows his nose and settles himself back into the chair. Light from the window gathers in the dented brass spittoon — red and green — and swirls away, up a carved walnut table leg. There is a faint buzz, muted shears, a low voice. Laughter. Magazines. The double chins jiggle. Fingers snap, plucking at a freshly shaved jowl.

The shoeshine boy climbs down from his chair mounted high on a wooden platform, folds the comic book carefully and stuffs it into his pocket. He swept the corner. He swept around the table with the magazines, he swept under the feet of the pimpled lad behind *Knight*.

In the second chair the salesman with chins coughs and hauls himself erect, blinks at his reflection in the mirror: newly shaved and pumped full of thick blood. He smacks his lips and shoves his tongue into his cheek, stretching it out, then rubs the skin critically with his thumbnail. His barber, lean and tall, bends at the waist to sight over his shoulder, grinning at their two-headed reflection. The fat salesman scratches his head, looks at the clock and orders a shampoo. The barber lean man nods and begins to arrange the instruments.

"What I can't figure," Claude's barber says, "is why we let them get away with it. Those bums down there in Washington."

Could this be his friend in the desert? A downtrodden worker, country boy exploited, ready to rebel? Slipping his hand out from under the sheet, Claude lays it gently upon the young man's arm. Revolutions are built from just such small encounters between men who think alike. Such modest beginnings. In the next chair the red-neck salesman coughs and spits while the lean barber's fingers work a lather into his scalp. He wipes his mouth with the back of his hand and says, "Those bastards never made a payroll. That's their trouble." And the professor nods to his barber. He senses something in the

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man that is struggling to rise above the — he call it — crass materialism of our age. Undefined. Only a breath, perhaps, of the fresh air from his country boyhood: haystacks, and pigs, cows, manure, pitchforks, old barns full of rats, corncribs. . . . The professor's idea of country life is rather vague, comes from *Sat Eve Post* covers mostly. "Selling is like shaving," the fat man says, "if you don't do it every day, you're a bum."

The customer in the first chair by the window, who until then had been only fingers around the edge of the financial pages of *The New York Times,* peered out now over the top of the paper and scowled from under his brows. His barber is stropping a razor beside the chair — a fluffy little man with a modest wen behind his left ear. The *Times* speaks a word about "Stimulate the economy" or "Balance of payments." The professor does not understand in terms of economics. He know moral, though. Man, he dig in the tune of ethics. And he squeeze the barber's arm. Who looks at him ferociously and snaps the scissors so close to his ear that he winces before he smiles.

In disguise now. Wince and smile. The Worm he is not yet ready to turn. We'll smile awhile, then we'll rise up and shave their arrogant heads — all the barbers, dentists, generals, Presidents in the land, all those who so arrogantly support this injustice. This horror! Open your noses, citizens! Open your noses and smell the horror that surrounds you!

The salesman flexed his chins and the red rings that made up what he had of a neck and he said, "It is business made this country great, sir, and don't you forget it. Henery the Eighth he didn't have the convenience my old lady's got."

The professor look down. He look down cross-eye pass his nose, seeing what he could see. He could see the white. Oh, he do see the white nose. But soon he gone see the black nose of the cowled crime fighter.

If they persist in their arrogant folly, they will suffer.

The pimpled boy, who is reading the girlie magazines while waiting for his turn, folds the center spread back into *Playboy* and says something about not even Louis the Fourteen didn't have a Playboy bed, which has a radio and a phonograph and a toaster and a coffeepot on it. Also a TV. "I have one of those Playboy beds, I'd make out like a bandit." He improvises on the theme: "What d' ya wanna bet she had lice, Marie Antoinette?"

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The professor laughs with them to keep the cover story intact. Because the time is not quite yet.

The salesman with his head in a cap of white foam lumbers out of the chair and squats on a stool while the lean man works over him with tubes and sprays and the pink rubber massage instruments. "Take me now," he says. "I sell . . ." Water gurgles over his product. Lost all in bubbles. He shakes his head and continues: "You can tell the bubbles of living in a country by how much of our bubbles they consume."

The shoeshine boy shakes his broom in the air, bald of bristles. "Just look at this fucken thing, Ed. Two weeks old already. When you gonna buy me a decent fucken broom, Ed?"

"Watch your mouth, you little coon, I'll sic Charlie on you tromp your black ass down a peg."

Charlie is the professor's barber and he scowls at the boy. He menace him with a squint-eye stare.

"The trick is to create a desire," the *Times* says. "Where would you be if you had to sell that stuff on its merits?"

The fat man rises out of the sink, water and foam falling about his shoulders and onto the floor, like Neptune from the sea; the Master of Commerce, the great bubbles salesman shoves three fingers into the air and announces, "Business made this country, sir, and selling made business. How else do you think we got to be the center of the world? It was people like me you got to thank for that."

The man in the first chair shrugs and returns to his paper, while the barber combs his hair, holding the comb with his little finger stiff like an old maid with her tea.

"Hey, Charlie, gimme one of your Marlboros, willya?" The shine boy leans on his broom and Claude looks him over: *mon semblable,* he thinks, *mon frère.* About sixteen years old, he has the old man's slouch, walks as if his feet were tender. But he's got a heavy process on his head and a flash in his eye. Claude imagines the blade in the hip pocket, *mon semblable.* Black.

The Worm!

"Smoke your own one time, willya, Sam?"

"Come on, Charlie. I'm all out and I gotta take a dump."

"Jesus Christ, what a pervert!"

The boy sticks the cigarette in his teeth and shuffles out.

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"Kid can't take a crap without he's smoking a cigarette. And him just a kid."

Claude nods in dismay. The rain falls. Itching in the black underwear, ready to turn and leap for freedom, for justice, he undo the first button.

The *Times* chuckles because, he says, he can't wait to tell them at the office, the guys got that account, how a shoeshine boy cannot perform, he say, "a natural function" without he's smoking a Marlboro.

There is always this thick scent of violence about a barbershop. Blood and gauze. Stale air and cigar smoke, cheap perfumes, lavender soaps, the sharp stickiness of pine-oil floorwashes and disinfectants: the smell of the slaughterhouse. Rape and pillage and war and football. Every lynching begins in a barbershop. Every bombing raid. No, no, man. It's in your head only. It's an ordinary barbershop, dig? Isn't it? Isn't it ordinary? Yes, but all the *ordinary,* the heaps of ordinary. That's just it. All this ordinary. . . .

"Lookit here," the high-school boy says, emerging from the pink magazine. "It says here Stalin's alive out there in Elay causing all them riots."

Undo another button there, slip in a finger under the broadcloth shirt, and feel, yes, the spade, *spadu.* If they even suspected, they would mend their ways.

The salesman in the next chair closes his eyes, leans back with his head cradled in the fat folds of his neck, while the barber massages his head with an electric vibrator. Someone hums "Take Me Out to the Ball Game," scissors click, traffic noises intrude. And Claude sits hunched in his liberal waspish disguise, pretending to be white and protestant and middle class. Feeling the despair of being of the dominant class but despising its values. Of automatically enjoying privileges before all men possess them. Of being alienated with no clear personal reason for his alienation. As a young man his secret fantasy had been to imagine himself a Jew. Later he had come to think of himself as a white Negro. One of the despised. One whose suffering was *real,* transcending ego: suffering that demands justice, not sympathy. One who could suffer without being offered aspirin and psychotherapy. One who could suffer purely.

So he had finally decided to change things. He wrote letters and

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signed petitions, the message of which was always the same: "Dear Mr. President [Senator, Bishop, Ambassador, etc.]: For God's sake, why don't you put into operation the values you profess? Sincerely, A Troubled Friend." He'd even gone himself once to help out, but after two years doing some sort of research into bean production, he'd fallen into heavy despair, taken to drinking five martinis on the way home and finally quit. At the university again he'd lectured wittily and ironically, made speeches before the faculty senate promoting good causes, sent two students into the Peace Corps, sat-in several times, freedom-rode once, taught-in, read-in and marched, not to mention the voting and, of course, always the letters, letters, letters. He had begun to put on a little weight and to suspect that nothing much was going to come of it all. They didn't seem to be listening out there. He began to get a little queer: he wore orange silk shirts occasionally, and once in the fall he'd read poetry to the rush-hour commuters on the Paoli local (dressed up in a cowboy suit — "This is a stick-up!" he shouted and whipped Yeats out of his holster). But even then, he felt himself to be A Troubled Friend: The Loyal Opponent. Then one afternoon last week he'd discovered two dreadful things. He could not remember his children's names. And he just did not feel like a troubled friend any more. He did not feel friendly at all. And it began to dawn upon him that he might have to declare war.

He'd gone to bed with a heavy cold, but on the third morning he rose up and, while his wife was at work, dyed a suit of long underwear in the bathtub. He moved some clothes, books and a sleeping bag into the garage, made himself a bed in the back seat of the car, stuck his feet out the window and spent the day reading comic books. His wife was distressed to find him there, and questioned him about the sleeping bag, the coffee brewing on a Coleman stove in the front seat of the car, the suit of long underwear hanging from the rafters, dripping black dye onto the floor. He'd answered to the effect that it was semester break and he'd take his vacation right there if he felt like it. When she pleaded with him to return to the house, he explained that "cowboys don't kiss girls," and threatened to set fire to himself if she should be foolish enough to summon his so-called friends to reason with him. She, Paula, Mrs. Flowers, née Button, had lived with him for seventeen years already, so she told

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him to go fuck himself, and went into the house to make dinner. She brought him his meals, which she left on paper plates outside the garage door. After two days in the garage and one brief run around the neighborhood to test the disguise, he dressed, slipped into the house to shave and came out to meet the world, a transformed man, in the black sedan, in the underwear, with his kinky head, or so he thought, out to set things right, no longer by voting, or speaking, or writing. But by the last resort: Leaping.

For after all what is a man to do? When everything is so fat. And his Negro friends all have barbecue sets in their back yards. And his Jewish friends all support the unions' foreign policies. When all the good, kind, respectable people — the mothers, the priests, the Chambers of Commerce, the Boy Scouts — when they all support the Horror? When he is laughed at by students for trying to be with it. And beaten by youth gangs for being only white. (But I'm black *inside,* he kept telling them while they beat him.) What indeed?

He come out in disguise and he park he black sedan and he wait, layin' low in dere, he don' say *nothin'*. That's what a man do!

"Man," the pimpled boy announced, "wouldn't you like to smack that smack?" He opens the center spread and holds it up so everyone can admire a girl spread out on a zebra rug. She appears to have been sprayed all over with orange paint and the crack of her ass is darkly shadowed — deep enough to hide an army of raging juveniles.

"That's why I'm taking up body building," the boy says. "There's this guy comes into the weight room, a guy with eighteen-inch arms, he told me he met this girl she confess to him that women can't resist a man's got eighteen-inch arms. All they can do is try to stay away from them because once they get too close to them it's curtains."

"Don't you believe it," Charlie the barber says. "Most of those body builders are fairies."

Charlie's hand is plump. It reminds the professor-hero of a fat frog. The short black hairs on the knuckles stand out stiffly in contrast to the softness of the skin.

"You shoulda seen what I saw," the boy continued. "There was this guy in the locker room yesterday he was shaving his belly with a Lady Schick."

The salesman's eyes open slowly and roll into focus. "Moral

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decay!" he says. "We oughta take people like that. . . ." The barber plucks at his jowls and the rest of the sentence is lost. "It's because of all those fairies in Washington. If we was as great a country as we think we are, we'd castrate the cocksuckers." He settles his head against the cushion and closes his eyes again as the barber snips the hairs out of his nose.

"Karate's my game," says the *Times*. He strikes a pose under the barber's sheet, then brings a hand down hard upon the arm of the chair. "I've got this chop," he said, "that can permanently paralyze a man, just like that" — with a snap of the fingers. "One quick chop and you'd be crippled for life." He smiled at them, one by one.

Charlie whispers into the professor's ear. "I can see me fix that dude. He's dancing around with his wrists all out of joint getting ready to give me the chop and I walk up real cool and I pole him one time in the snot locker. He come all apart like one of those break-away movie chairs or something. Like inna cartoon. He lays there in chunks. His wrists still all cocked out of joint." It amused him so much he laughed, inhaled a mouthful of loose hair himself and turned away, spitting and choking.

An alarm goes off in the professor's skull: an old alarm too long ignored. Like water faintly dripping late at night — the sound that grows to block out sleep, the thunder of a leaking faucet or mortality or injustice — the old alarm arouses him with its intolerable hammering. And he unbuttons his shirt under the sheet and feels inside his secret underwear. Surely it is time. The violence, this incredible grass-roots violence! The Worm must always. . . .

Claude reminds himself that he is still who he is: associate professor, father and husband, owner of house, keeper of yard. But he loosens his belt and one more button. He is ready to get ready.

He is a cautious man, not at all given to precipitous turnings. So although he is no longer A Troubled Friend, or any other kind of friend to *them,* and although he knows that the letters in their bottles have all drifted out to sea only to sink, and even though he has no faith in the word any more, he makes his little speech. He addresses his barber, country Charlie with the ducktail hair and the fat hand; the middle man, lean, choleric; and his patient, fat and sanguine; the first-chair owner, old maid with powdered wen; and the corporate image with head tilted to side to check the gray temples;

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the pimpled boy erected now behind *Cavalier*; the emptied shine boy, chocolate lad of sixteen, dead butt in his teeth and lacquer on his head. He speak from the heart and not so much the head, address all this dumb world:

"We've got to tolerate those different from ourselves even if they don't tolerate us. Why are you all so violent? Look here. What ever happened to generosity of spirit? Even in love we want victory and violence. (Note: *to fuck,* an ancient word, probably Sanskrit, meaning 'to hit or strike.') Why do we want to *control* everything? To smash everything different from ourselves? We must learn to live in peace with those who are. . . ."

The seat tilts back and Charlie hits him with a hot towel.

"Commie fascist rat," the salesman mutters. "This is a great country it wasn't for you pinko commie creeps, you creep."

"Make your face feel great. Get rid of that puffiness," says the barber.

Beneath the towel, in its hot snow folds, the professor weeps silently. The word is dead, why waste the word? I saw it die on TV of a late Tuesday. "What puffiness?"

"He's right, you know." The voice comes from near the front window. It is the blue broadcloth voice. "About the Anglo-Saxon *hehehe*. Partridge makes the point, I believe."

"Well, wow! I'd sure like to hit or strike some of this old smack then." Paper rustles as the boy turns out yet another center spread. The professor imagines a smiling girl spilling maggots. He is very sad under his towel. The great cities are crumbling. Being melted down for cannon. Get that irony: getting big muscles while the heart collapses and the guts grow ulcers and the mind shrivels. Oh, Spengler (calls he out, 'cause he's a prof of history, maybe, to that god), the great crumbling cities, who would have guessed they'd die, not being bombed, but bombing? Apollo grows female dugs, is worshiped as Hermaphrodite to blow and be blown by the golden boys; Dionysos is carried about in a wheelbarrow, fat, drunk, slavering, idiotic, impotent. And everywhere there is the fear of the great grass fire: the youth is corrupt. Only the soldier is pure, and he is pure in a brutal courage turned to an unjust end.

The towel unwinds and the ceiling comes into focus. Claude works his lips and blinks. "Don't misunderstand, gentlemen. I am a

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liberal, yes, but I give way to no man in my staunch anti-Communism." Why does he say this? For form only, because it's an old speech — a reflex which surprises even him.

"You hear him say 'peace'?" The salesman glared with reddened eye.

"Well, if I was there, you're gonna see some gooks fry." The boy stands up and holds open his suede jacket. On his shirt pocket is pinned an orange badge that says "KILL THE CONG."

"You one of those commie fink peace creep professors?" the salesman asks, eyes closed now to get his eyebrows trimmed.

"It's terrible. Just terrible." The professor leans forward to answer them all, all, and takes the scissor point in the flesh of his ear. "Ouch," he say with embarrassment, and Charlie: "Oh watch it man!" While he stumbles around. A spot of blood blossoms, but the hero speaks again, his wounds forgotten. "I'm no pacifist. We must meet evil with sufficient force to quell it." The room seems to echo the phrase: "Quell it. Quell it. Quell it." "But where is our humanity? Our compassion? Our humility?" He churn up his emotional volumes, he preach now out of the long experience he never have in storefront churches, street corner rallies, but all he can tune in is: "We should be ashamed!"

Claude leans back and surrenders to the barber, who dabs at his ear with a piece of cotton soaked in alcohol. He watches the long days of his hope stretch out before him: the clasping hands, men sharing a common cup, brothers in the field at hay time, muscles straining, voices raised in song. Through it he hears the echoes, the clamor, the buzzing clippers resonating in his skull, the slap of the razor on leather.

"A liberal is a socialist is a commie is a spy," the salesman said. His voice comes out of a long and ancient corridor.

"Well, *I'm* no coward," the master barber announces. "I think they oughta let us old guys go. I'd go tomorrow even if I am sixty-two years old. Yes, we could go and let our boys stay home. What's it matter if some old guy like me gets killed? Who's gonna care if a poor old guy gets killed?" He marches into battle, is hit, staggers and falls, wounded in the wen.

"If I didn't have this basketball scholarship for next year, I'd sign up in a minute," says the kid. "Man, you'd see them commies shit then. Pow. Pow."

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The professor closes his eyes to hear it worse. He is screaming at them from inside his eyelids. "Come on, fellas, let's talk it over *rationally*." But his compulsive black underwear reminds him of his secret role and his disastrous knowledge, en he lay low in dere, ain't sayin' nothin'.

The sedan waits for the getaway. And under the sheet he continues to unbutton.

"Shine 'em up, Mr. Mercer?" the shine boy asks the salesman.

"O.K., Sam. You shine 'em good or I'll kick your black ass all the way back to Africa, y'hear?" sezee goodnaturedly.

"Yassir, Mr. Mercer." He rolls his eyes and does a little jig.

"Free enterprise," the salesman says, "I ask you: Where would men like me be if Mousy Tongue was to take over? How about that, professor? What would happen to me?"

But he lay low now, unbutton another button, and don' say nothin'. Still his mind screams, Economic justice! Controls!

"Soon you salesmen'll be done for anyway," the *Times* says. "We'll displace you in your own lifetime. Subliminal appeal, that's the trick. They'll trample salesmen on their way to buy. Controlled impulse." The sheet flaps and he stands up and adjusts his tie, tilts his head to the side, notices a hair out of place and steps back into the chair for a touch-up.

The professor's brain is slammed into boxcars, separated from its wife and children, cornholed and skinned by mad faggot doctors, spread out to dry on barbed wire, molded into bowling shoes. Gassed, pickled and eaten by Control. So he says in spite of himself, says it heavily, deep from a suffering he is not supposed to know, nor alienation: "By you this is good news, already?"

The barber shrugged, dismissing him.

"How's that, Mr. Mercer? Shiny enough for you?" The boy sits back on his heels, smiling and rolling his eyes.

"Listen boy," the salesman says. He leans forward in the chair and holds out a five-dollar bill. "You can have this and keep the change you do me one little favor take about five minutes we drive to the park." His face contorts into a huge wink, the pound of flesh on his cheek rising ponderously to close his eye. The barber flips off the sheet and unpins the paper around the man's neck. He stands up and, as the boy dusts off his coat with a whisk broom, puts his arm

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around his shoulder and whispers in his ear. The lean man barber winks over at the polite wen, who whispers into the ear of the corporate image, who shakes his head in stern disapproval as he tightens his tie and slips his glasses back on. He takes his change quickly and, more or less clucking, pulls on his jacket.

The razor flashed as Charlie drew it over the leather. The professor wonders, Can the flesh really sharpen the steel? But he has turned from his old pacifism and reform politics. The time has come to act the hero. As he wiggles out of his pants under the sheet. The razor tugs at the hair over his ears.

"Not too high over the ears now."

"You wannit to last, don't you?"

"How about it, Sambo?" the salesman says. He has somehow enveloped the boy in his arm and the folds of his jacket. He leans his head down and whispers at him. The pimpled high-school hero has climbed into the chair, instructs the barber how to cut and warns him away from a boil below his ear; he too leans forward to observe the action. Charlie speaks softly in the professor's ear as he wipes away the soap with a warm towel: "Mr. Mercer, now he's got a *pee*culiar predilection." They all watched with heavy interest. Mercer himself, he wink to one and all. The boy squirms, reaches out for the five, draws back, thinks again, reaches out.

This is a job for the Worm. It's time for the Worm to enter the picture.

Pulling his arm out of the last sleeve now under the sheet, unbeknownst to all, he still lay low in dere, but he *ready,* man. Just wait his chance to leap out and strike a blow for freedom in this reactionary pit.

A ball of hair rolls down over the sheet as Charlie makes the final combings, and the professor, remembering his years committed to teaching the Truth and speaking out against injustice, shoulders his stone once more up that mountain. Skin magazines and dandruff remover, fat men with thick eyes and luxurious hair in their noses, courageous old men in diapers leading the armies of the young from their control booths on the hill, he has spoke out against them all. And still they come. Well, even though he know in his underwear what to think of *speech,* still he do speak out one again last time, saying, "See here, Mercer, if that's what your name is, it's men like

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you who've got us into this mess. You think you can buy anything, and what you can't buy you take by force, and what you can't take by force you get by cheating. Because you think it's yours already, I suppose. Arrogant boors is what you are. Self-assured provincials of race and nation. So you just leave that boy alone. If circumstances of racial and economic inequality require him to take a job in a place like this and associate with people like you, that is, far from being a license to exploit him, an absolute barrier to any plan you have to take advantage of him. Frankly, if I had my way, Mercer, I'd have you painted blue. Just to see how it feels. All of you, right down to the President."

There is a long moment of silence as they all turn and stare at him. The first to speak is the barber-general, the man on the first chair with the soldierly wen; he asks, "You got something against barbers, son? What do you mean, '*a place like this*'? I'll have you know I worked twenty years to buy this location. I got some of the most illuminous clientele inna whole city. And furthermore. . . ."

"Look at Barry Goldwater and Booker T. Washington," the lean man reminds them, "or Abe Lincoln or Tony Curtis or even Marilyn Monroe and our own L.B.J. My God, any of hundreds of great men who had to work up from humble beginnings. Let us not put down opportunity to work your way up from the bottom."

"Why I'm just giving this here lad a chance to earn a quick five," the salesman says with another wink. "A little work never hurt nobody, isn't that right, Sambo?"

"I won't have you insulting my customers, sir," says the wen. "Besides, that's violent, subversive talk. It's not nice, and I run a nice shop."

They look at him with immense hostility. The salesman sneers. So Claude he turn to his *frère* and he sez, sezee, "Brother, don't lower yourself."

And the black boy he say with such great and withering disdain that the professor cannot even hear him it hurt so bad, "Kiss my ass with your brother-shit. Somethin' like *you*." Then to the salesman, "C'mon, Mercer, make it a deck like last week and you're on."

"Ten it is, Sambo," Mercer says and pops a pork-pie hat on his hot head.

So because he cannot hear him through the pain of having heard,

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he is force he answer for him, as he *should* have known to say from the blackness of his old blood. The Worm he tell him, "Bred and bawn in a briar patch, honey! Bred and bawn in a briar patch!"

Charlie, busy and oblivious of most of this, has finished. "There you go, prof," he says. "All set for another thousand miles." As he unpins the sheet.

The black boy brandishes his broom. "Make fun of me, will you?"

"Get him," Mercer says. "Get the commie creep and there's another six bits in it for you."

What do you mean *in a place like this?* The razors are out. The pimpled boy screams as the lean man barber scrapes carelessly over his boil. The corporate man hurries on his coat, turning up the collar to hide his face. Charlie prepares to swish off the sheet, and at that moment, after years of despair and days of crazy preparation, in the face of this immoral confusion, these brushes, these red necks and hairy noses, this incomprehension, this futility of speech and peaceful petition, this insane vulgarity enshrined as status quo, these good people boiling babies, this tolerance among the killing jars, in the face of this and after years of qualifying self-doubting tolerant honesty, here against the backdrop of a brass spittoon, the Worm turns.

As the sheet falls away, he rises in the chair, rising to the ceiling, striking terror into callow hearts, rising out of the tangle of clothing — tweed trousers, button-down shirt, Rooster tie — rising black and menacing, arms outstretched, not pleading for justice but at last ready to act to secure it. He rises up in the barber chair against all this. All of it!

Hurriedly pulling on a black wool stocking cap to which he has affixed a child's Halloween mask, Professor Claude Flowers prepares to strike the fear at these fools. Stands there poised to leap down upon them, stands baggy and a little paunchy in his long now black underwear on the chest of which he has sewn a strange device cut from blue felt, something like a spade it is. He expands his chest to fill the room; he stretches out his arms, gigantic arms that bulge with black muscle, fearful arms, eighteen-, twenty-, thirty-inch biceps boom out his message of doom to evil. They fall back before him. Mercer, the most immediate object of the Worm's indignation, cringes

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in a corner, pulling his coat around him, ducking his face behind his shoulder to ward off blows. The wen drops his razor and clutches a bottle of Jeris hair tonic to his chest, preserving what he can of his life and property. The corporate man has rushed into the street at the first stirrings; he is calling for the police but has attracted so far the attention only of a Meter Maid who is in the process of ticketing the getaway car. The shine boy grabs up the ten-dollar bill and bounds to the top of the shoeshine stand, from which he pelts the masked marvel with cans of shoe polish. Recovering from the pain of his bruised boil, the pimpled lad, fully in tune with the spirit of fun he perceives to have swept over the barbershop, announces, thus christening our hero: "Oh man, it's Super Spoon. Oh wow. Oh zonk!"

The cowled crime fighter, now as King Kong, beleaguered as that other great hero, by not pursuit planes but now screaming murderous cans of shoe polish, leaps. He leaps. The great leap. Cape spreading in the wind. The athletic champion of justice, the super culture-hero — everybody's dreamboat — the leaper upon cringing, craven villains, leaps. The great leap to set things straight.

But he has failed to free his feet from the tangle of trousers about his ankles, and the gymnastic leap that would, if successful, have brought the caped and cowled super-hero lightly on his toes to a confrontation with Fat Salesman, has instead plummeted a middle-aged, crazy exhibitionist in wormy Halloween costume head first into the table of girlie magazines.

Tips and rolls. Tumbles among the torn and birdlike flapping magazines. A few bottles crash fragrantly to the floor in their astonishment. Brass spittoon rings. Can of Kiwi black caroms off his head and through the door. A shatter of glass.

He rises slowly and straightens his woolly cap and mask, sitting in his confusion and tangled trousers, stunned from his flaming crash dive. While the customers laugh, the owner groans, the shine boy, whom he has saved, shouts taunts of Brother! Brother! Brother! at him, and the Meter Maid arrives to ask: "What's going on here?"

Sitting on the floor at the foot of the villainous salesman whom he had leaped to quell, the Worm tries to 1) answer, and 2) get up. But his mask has fallen across his face making speech difficult, and his feet are caught up in his trousers.

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"Madam," he is able to say, "arrest these men."

Just before Mercer aims the nicely pointed toe of a thirty-dollars-a-pair shoe at his belly and lets him have it.

"Take that, you fucken commie creep nigger-lovin' peace fink."

Not to be outdone in the expression of patriotism, the owner of the shop gleefully pours one bottle of scalp tonic over him, while mentally adding its cost to the bill.

The shine boy aims a shoe brush at his head and lets fly wickedly.

The high-school hero spits, and the other two barbers kick his clothes into the street.

The lady cop, seeing where advantage lies, does her duty: swatting on the head with her ticket book this indecently clad maniac who, clutching his ears and groaning, collapses into a stupor among the brass photographs, muttering, "You should be ashamed! Burning. Burning."

Etched in his head: the misery of slums, give the kids a Milky Way before the burning, the fires everywhere, the bombers everywhere, everywhere the fires.

"Men," he cries, "not so smug! Please not so smug!"

Clutching his head, he crawls powerless under the table, among the brass spittoons and playmates, holding on to a table leg, pulling his cape around his ears, while they tug at his ankles, laughing and joking, kicking in the ass this peace-creep idiot in black underwear who has brought a little bit of laughter into what had begun as just another dull day in the City of Brotherly Love.

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# BLACK POWER: A DISCUSSION

EDITORS' NOTE: *The following statements in response to an invitation to comment on some of the issues raised by Martin Duberman's piece on Black Power in the last issue of* PR *were written before Senator McCarthy's phenomenal vote in New Hampshire, Senator Kennedy's entry into the ring, and President Johnson's withdrawal from the contest. And so these events could not have been taken into account in this discussion of Black Power.*

*Further comments will appear in the next issue.*

## Robert Coles

In 1964 I worked with Stokely Carmichael in Oxford, Ohio, and later in Mississippi. Hundreds of students were going South to initiate the Mississippi Summer Project and those of us who had lived "down there" and had worked in "the movement" had to "orient" that Project's members, three of whom were killed before we left the Buckeye state for the Magnolia one. In those days — incredibly less than four years ago, I have to remind myself as I now write — we talked about the vote. Black or white, rich or poor, we all could agree on that point: the right to vote belongs to everyone in a twentieth-century nation that calls itself a democracy.

When the summer was over there were not very many more Negro voters in Mississippi than there ever had been — though not too long afterwards the Congress passed laws that finally changed matters in the South. Now Negroes can vote in counties where they never dreamed it would be possible, and now a well-to-do black man can sit and eat his steak in a Holiday Inn or a Howard Johnson's restaurant outside of Atlanta or Birmingham.

"It took us years to get that, and then we found that we got nothing, nothing really for the millions of black people who can vote all day long and still be hungry, and go order a hamburger and an

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ice cream cone and sit and eat them — but not have the money to pay, no man."

I heard that early in 1967 from a young man I had known for years. I knew him in Georgia, where he took part in one sit-in after another, to get into those Howard Johnson's and Holiday Inns. I knew him in Alabama, through which he traveled on the Freedom Rides. I knew him in Mississippi, where he just barely managed to live while he urged upon American citizens the traitorous desire to vote. I knew him in the jails of Birmingham, Jackson and the Delta, where all those trumped-up charges had brought him. I visited him in those disgraceful jails and talked with him, and each time he used words like "justice" and "equality" and "progress" and "enlightenment." I remember that after I left the prison one time I wondered how long such a man's patience and kindness could last. He was fighting for American principles, and his reward was primitive, foul-smelling American dungeons, with plenty of beefy uniformed men to swear and threaten and beat the "goddam nigger-jew-communists" who were threatening — well, everything, of course.

By 1967 that young man (still safely under thirty) could laugh at all he had done, laugh at over five years of incredible sacrifice and devotion. He turned on himself as well as white people with a vengeance: "I was a fool, a fool drunk with a crazy dream that turned into a nightmare, if you ask me. We all thought we could get down on our hands and knees and ask Mr. White-Middle-Class-America to remember his own hard times and his civics lessons in school — and come join us to make this country over, to put an end to the *lip-service* it pays to words like 'democracy.' We figured we couldn't lose. We figured — oh, can I remember the bull sessions, all night ones! — that the big, strong United States was actually running scared. It was fighting Communists, who said it was another colonial country, allied to rich, corrupt cliques in Greece or Spain, not to mention all over Africa and Asia. It was fighting the Communists in the name of *freedom* and *liberty* and *democracy* — and so it was embarrassing that the Negro, the black man, lives like he does here, close to a slave, very close. So, we figured the white man in America, he'd not only come over to our side for *idealistic* reasons, but for *practical* reasons, too. And we were wrong, dead wrong. Instead, he passed himself a couple of laws, to make it look like the South had entered the twentieth century, and then he went off to Asia to make sure the twentieth century knows it's still white people who make the big decisions all over the world. That's what we saw, and that's what made us look in the mirror and say 'fool, fool.'

"Now you say I'm tired and you keep on wondering why I want

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to use the word 'black' instead of 'Negro.' I know what you're thinking, man. You think 'Black Power' is a fad, a slogan, and probably something a guy like me needs, because he's tired, because he's worn-out. Maybe so, but it's more than that. To me, to Stokely, to all of us, the fact that we're talking 'Black Power' now means that we've grown up. I mean, we're finally as sophisticated as every local politician in America is. They know that you have to have a *constituency,* a following that sticks together and pushes — pushes hard enough to make even critics think twice before they criticize. I mean, if a cardinal says something wild, or a rabbi or a high-up minister, or the head of some big ethnic group — well, the newspapers and TV people watch themselves carefully when they disagree, and so do the congressmen. And when those kinds of leaders *want* something, people start getting ready to give — from the President on down.

"We used to think it was different with us. We used to think we could pray, and hold hands, and sing, and appeal to Lincoln and The Bill of Rights and all that. Well, we tried and we got little — little food, little work, little of anything except a chance to vote for George C. Wallace and Mrs. George C. Wallace and Lester Maddox. And up North, all we have to do is try to move into a Chicago suburb or a Milwaukee one and you'd think — how does it go, the movie, *The Russians are Coming.* Actually, they'd rather have Communists in Cicero than us. That's where even Communism takes a back seat to the Negro in the American's list of things to run away from."

There is more, much more. We have talked for hours, then and at other times. It is absurd to say that "Black Power" means any one particular thing. At a certain moment in history to a certain kind of Negro the term came to mind and reflected all sorts of social, psychological, political and economic considerations. I don't think the *concept* "Black Power" can in itself "do" or "change" much today. (What can?) I only know as an observer the concrete experiences and realities that have made men like Stokely Carmichael or the one I have quoted feel as they do, speak as they do — and be heard as they are being heard by millions of worried and angry white Americans.

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## Ivanhoe Donaldson

Every generation senses some sort of crisis of its time. The crises of these times, at least in terms of internal domestic problems, are

a) the question of racism
b) the urban crisis.

This does not mean to say that these are the only crucial problems facing domestic America today, but that outside of the question of American foreign policy in general and the war in Vietnam specifically, these issues are paramount.

Technological advancement in industry has not only created a life of luxury for some, it is eating up the blue-collar job market and creating a situation of permanent unemployment for others.

The haphazard and sloppy fashion in which most city bureaucracies are run leave the poverty pockets and the urban ghettos open to ruthless exploitation by slum landlords, merchants, ambitious politicians, prison–camp school systems — and the list goes on and on.

The black community is not only unable to find the political levers which would provide at the minimum an atmosphere of hope in the ghettos, but is consistently undermined by what Stokely Carmichael often refers to as *institutional racism.*

After having spent decades enslaved to the rhetoric of the liberal and radical community, and seeing the situation growing steadily more explosive, young militants and radicals began to holler "Black Power."

The demand for Black Power isn't new. Afro-American nationalists have been talking about it in one sense or another throughout the twentieth century, and before. What really polarized the term Black Power wasn't the sensationalism of the press, but the inability of the intellectuals of the liberal community to develop a new analysis and a new scheme to rebuild a decaying society infiltrated by racism. The black community was beginning to take its cues from its own established leadership, rather than from the leadership the liberal community or Establishment provided.

The lack of creative depth in the intellectual community becomes painfully clear when we see how often the intellectuals are willing to run the gauntlet to attack, under the guise of analysis, without ever providing any new ideas of how to deal with the cleavages in the society. In many ways, Bayard Rustin's Freedom Budget is one of the few *ideas* to evolve out of the intellectual community, and it provided nothing radically different for the life style of the ghettos, aside from the fact that it is intentionally designed to give support to the war in

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Vietnam. Seymour Melman and his crew have poured in a few thoughts toward rebuilding urban America, but his ideas appear to offer no more than the Freedom Budget in the final analysis.

Martin Duberman in his piece on "Black Power in America" said, "It is not clear whether 'Black Power' is to be taken as a short-term tactical device or a long-range goal — that is, a postponement or a rejection of integration; whether it has been adapted as a lever for intimidating whites or organizing blacks, for instilling race hate or race pride. . . ." Let me suggest here that Black Power is not meant to answer any of Duberman's queries.

Black Power is a step in establishing a framework which rejects once and for all the white community defining what the black community should and should not do about its problems. Black leadership has never argued that Black Power would be the panacea for the urban ghetto, but rather that it might set a framework for dealing with institutional racism and with the question of exploitation and poverty within the black community. For this reason, a discussion of Black Power, in and of itself, is a discussion without substance.

If one agrees that civil-rights legislation has offered very little to improve the life style of blacks in this country, and that both the federal and local government lack agility and creativity to deal with the urban crisis, then the focus of the discussion should not be the pros and cons of Black Power but how, for example, to give political support to blacks who are trying to develop a quality school system with a cultural base which reflects the black community, or how to develop an economic and political system which reflects a black cultural base. The black community cannot support itself solely from within: in order for it to get external support in a framework which isn't racist or paternalistic, there will have to be a radicalizing movement in the whole society.

Intellectuals, liberals, reformers need to raise more basic questions as to whether a bipartisan hierarchical system is still adequate to meet the day-to-day problems of people in the inner city.

The way to stop the burnings of the inner city isn't to devise plans to stop it, but to develop and reorganize the economic institutions which are the fundamental causes of the major problems of domestic America.

If the society is unable to develop economic restructuring within the inner cities, resistance will heighten and the rhetoric of revolution and repression might in fact become the order of the day.

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## Paul Feldman

One of the virtues of Martin Duberman's essay on "black power" is that it provides readers a useful framework in which to consider aspects of that ambivalent movement and ambiguous ideology. Most of those still claiming efficacy for "black power" stratagems (either those offered by its Third World separatist-oriented Left Wing or business-oriented Right Wing) have retreated to arguments that they can aid Negroes in the development of effective "ethnic politics." I will limit my remarks to a critique of this view and argue that it is the strategy of coalition politics that was and remains an essential ingredient in the struggles of excluded ethnic, religious or racial minorities for a place in the sun.

Let me begin with what I consider to be an ironic footnote to current discussions on this question. A few years before Stokely Carmichael first discovered "black power," Bayard Rustin was engaged in a debate with him and other SNCC militants. Rustin, a leading theoretician of coalition politics, was pressing them to give up their total reliance on protest tactics which, he felt, had been escalated to the point of no return, and to engage in power politics. In his prophetic article, "From Protest to Politics" (*Commentary,* February, 1965), Rustin said:

"If there is anything positive in the spread of the ghetto, it is the potential political power base thus created, and to realize this potential is one of the most challenging and urgent tasks before the civil rights movement. If the movement can wrest leadership of the ghetto vote from the machines, it will have acquired an organized constituency such as other major groups in our society now have."

This is now accepted by black powerites, but not the corollary strategic conception presented by Rustin in the same article:

"Neither the movement nor the country's twenty million black people can win political power alone. We need allies. The future of the Negro struggle depends on whether the contradictions of this society can be resolved by a coalition of progressive forces which becomes the effective political majority in the United States."

Rustin's two-pronged approach for gaining Negroes substantive power and economic progress has considerable precedence in successful strategies used by other excluded minority groups to gain social justice. The alternative models for political, social and cultural organization that black powerites, moderates and white powerites have been urging Negroes to imitate have all proved inadequate. My necessarily sketchy remarks on these models, I hope, will caution against excessive nostalgia for

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the past and suggest a more meaningful perspective for the future.

Negroes in search of power are urged to follow in the path of the Irish, Italian, Slavic, etc., political machines. At worst, the ethnic clubhouses provided social mobility and egress from the slums for those at the top and turkeys for those at the bottom. At best, they provided some power and marginal, although at the time significant, socioeconomic benefits for the ethnic communities they sometimes served. But these gains fell far short of what is offered to the deprived by the present grossly inadequate welfare institutions and programs.

There is much to be learned from the Boston-Irish and Tammany machines about political organization, but it is already known by Negro politicians. The Democratic Party organizations of Carl Stokes in Cleveland and Richard Hatcher in Gary are a significant advance over the Dawson machine's plantation politics. They provide a real measure of democratic political power for the Negro community. But the slogan "black power" is either irrelevant or positively harmful in such situations. This was why both Stokes and Hatcher made it unmistakably clear to Carmichael and other firebrands to stay away. Their appearance would have totally polarized the racial situation, making it impossible for these candidates to win the necessary margin of white votes.

Mayors Stokes and Hatcher now face the enormous problems of urban neglect and decay. To solve them requires an input of economic resources that can only be acquired through Negro coalescence with other groups and social forces on the local and national level. All ethnic political machines were tied to national political parties using the leverage of their voting power to acquire goods and services from them. "Black power" ideologues have nothing to offer Stokes and Hatcher except bad advice about forming a Black Party. This would have lost them the election and, if followed now, would lock them out of effective political life. More fundamentally, racial posturing exacerbates divisions between groups with similar economic interests. A classic example of this occurred recently in New York City. While some Negro community groups under the banner of "black power" and some Puerto Rican groups under the banner of "brown power" were locked in a bitter conflict over control of a local poverty program, Congress was slashing anti-poverty funds.

Great deficiencies exist in many of the models of economic organization being urged for Negro uplift. Black Power's Right Wing has taken the Jewish businessman as a prototype for emulation as well as dislike. He, they say (and many Jewish businessmen will agree), pulled himself up by his own bootstraps and in the process uplifted his people

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as well. The Jewish businessman's rise was mainly on the backs of Jewish workers. The ghetto sweatshops may be a dim and unpleasant memory for those whose ownership of them facilitated their movement to the suburbs. But not apparently to some Negro entrepreneurs who want to get there too.

There is talk in these circles of a separate black capitalist system or nation within the U.S. This would mean, as Tom Kahn has pointed out, the replacement of a "colonial economy" (to use the terms of the black power movement) dominated by whites with a neocolonial system overseen by some blacks but still dominated by white capitalists. One aspect of this idea is grounded in reality, an exploitative one. Some sections of corporate finance might be willing to provide capital investment to placate a part of the Negro community which would be used to pacify the rest. This alliance of Negro businessmen and white corporation heads, not a separatist economy, is the serious alternative to the strategy of coalition with organized labor proposed by Rustin.

It is not surprising that aspiring Negro entrepreneurs are marching under the Black Nationalist banner. This is one of the reasons so few black workers can be found in the ranks: all "national" or "ethnic" bourgeoisie have a history of superexploitation of their own people. This, in fact, is how such strata get assimilated into the mainstream.

"Black power's" Left Wing has just as little to offer the Negro working class and underclass. It preaches a kind of socialism in one ghetto that is as utopian as it is irrelevant to the needs of the Negro poor. For, as Marx pointed out and Stalin proved, social equality cannot be built on foundations of economic scarcity. This is exactly what a separatist black socialist movement would be attempting.

Those who propose it are not even serious about the idea. Stokely Carmichael's call for a "United Black Front" would have to include, and does, black slumlords and black tenants, black businessmen and black workers. Civil rights activist Norman Hill came across such a phenomenon while organizing rent strikes in Chicago's Negro ghetto under the auspices of UAW community unions. Negro landlords unsuccessfully appealed in the name of "black power" to Negro tenants, some of whom were nationalists, to reject the rent strike of the "honky" union, which they said was attempting to divide the black community. This confrontation was a vivid demonstration of the oft repeated remark that "black power" means different things to different people.

While black powerists make alliances with Negro entrepreneurs, many of whom have a stake in exploitation and segregation, their attack often is directed at a more progressive section of the Negro middle class

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which is propertyless and has demonstrated considerable commitment to fighting for equal rights.

The attempts by "black power's" Left Wing to ignore or paper over economic divisions in the Negro community is a symptom of its conservative tendencies. These class divisions are the basis for struggle not accommodation. Similar conflicts have occurred in every minority group. They existed between the "shanty" Irish and the "lace curtain" Irish. The beginnings of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union came, in large part, out of the struggle of Jewish workers against Jewish garment manufacturers. Italian workers had to contend with the strike-breaking tactics of the Mafia-style gangs of the day who, to be sure, helped some Italians muscle into the business world.

Thus models for economic and political organization that emphasize ethnic, religious or racial unity over class solidarity usually contain a conservative bias. I do not mean by this to minimize the desire and the need for Negro unity against the very real threat of white racism. However, the only force that can maintain unity in the Negro community around the concept of separatism is not the incantations of the Black Power movement but an onslaught of the most brutal and violent forms of white oppression (a confrontation which some Black Powerists now welcome as a way out of their dilemma). If this can be prevented, the real choice before the Negro community becomes not separatism or integration, but assimilation of the few or the struggle to integrate the many. Thus, only the fight for integration can provide a progressive unifying strategy for the Negro community. In this situation the role of black radicals should be to insure that the Negro masses fully share in the benefits of integration.

There should be an end to the mythology that most minority groups pulled themselves up by their own ethnic bootstraps and to the admonitions to Negroes to do likewise. This school of thought knows little about the history of the Negro or that of the European immigrants who came to the United States. The Negro, during his migration from plantation to ghetto, organized as many cooperative associations, religious and political groups and educational societies as the groups he is asked to emulate. One of the tragedies of Negro life was that all this effort at community building could be of little avail. The cause lies in the separatism forced on the Negro community by the white majority — a system of exclusion that went far beyond the discrimination experienced by other minority groups.

Their organizations would have floundered under similar circumstances. Their function would have remained to transmit the few into

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the broader society and help sustain the many who would have been forced to accept a life of deprivation and poverty. They were able to accomplish more for the communities they served only because of the historical transformation undergone by American society beginning in the thirties with the emergence of political movements and forms of social organization that transcended the limitations of ethnic politics.

Progress came mainly through the joint struggle of American working-class groups of every nationality and color to build the industrial unions and through their coalition within the Northern wing of the Democratic Party around the demand for a "New Deal." (The demand for "Irish power," "Jewish power" or "Italian power," etc., would have splintered their ranks.) It was the role of the minorities in these two institutions that began their integration into the national economy and brought the industrial underclass of that day, or their offspring, some of the good things in life. (The reasons that most Negroes did not receive a substantial share of the benefits accruing from these struggles is too complicated to be explored in an essay of this length and cannot be explained solely by white racism, which, of course, was a major factor. Consideration must also be given to the fact that the overwhelming majority of Negroes were still living in the South, laboring in agriculture, at the time when the center of trade union organization and the progressive base of the New Deal was in the North.)

There are those from minority groups that the New Deal coalition started on the road to a better life who today admonish Negroes to make it through self-help. To maintain their privileges and prejudices, they invoke golden myths about their forebears' rise, and tragically some Negroes believe them. There are also white and black intellectuals who add to the confusion by telling Negroes that they can go it alone and succeed through a formula that combines revolutionary rhetoric, super-militant tactics and self-help programs. That the theories of the black powerists overlap with those of the ethnic mythologists is more than a strange coincidence. It is a sign that they have not developed a revolutionary or even an independent ideology. Their views should be seen more as a reflection of the present racial crisis than a prescription to resolve it in a progressive way.

## Charles V. Hamilton

Martin Duberman's article on Black Power is characteristic of many such reflections by people who probably style themselves as

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integrationists and as traditional supporters of civil-rights demands. The article clearly recognizes (1) the difficulty of pinning a common definition and meaning on the term "Black Power"; (2) the role of the press in adding to the confusion; (3) the need for black people to organize for power; (4) the developmental nature of social change — i.e., how relatively mild demands can (through the intransigence of society) become legitimately more insistent; and (5) the underlying distrust many Black Power people have for established decision-making authority.

Notwithstanding these accurate observations, Duberman still cannot quite come to terms with the concept of Black Power. And he raises some of the traditional cries heard around the country: is it an end in itself? is it hatred of whites? does it condone violence? is it a result of rising expectations or of ever-increasing pauperization? is it decentralist? At times, the article would indicate much more sophistication than these questions imply.

It is very clear that the answer to where Black Power is going lies largely in the response to be made by white decision-makers and their constituents. It is for whites to say whether violence will continue and will escalate. Duberman writes: "Thus, *if* one views the Garrisons and Carmichaels as 'extremists,' one should at least place the blame for that extremism where it belongs — not on their individual temperaments, their genetic predispositions, but on a society which scorned or toyed with their initial pleas for justice." What more need be said? The major talk — the bulk of the articles, books and speeches — of whites should be to each other on ways to break down the intransigence, indifference and resistance, not on nit-picking with Black Power. The crucial role for "white liberals" is to *infiltrate* the white community (P.T.A.'s, Rotary Clubs, real estate boards, chambers of commerce, neighborhood civic associations) and struggle to redirect racist thinking and policy toward more equitable ends. Why isn't there much more energy put into this? There is entirely too much time spent by whites worrying about the stance taken by the black minority, when it is clear that that stance is determined in large measure by the position assumed by the white majority — what else could be the meaning of Duberman's quote above?

Duberman's article falls victim to another major error. He uses a lot of space focusing on the rhetoric of a few highly visible leaders and on some written accounts of reporters. What Duberman and many other social scientists and journalists and numerous "ghetto-watchers" do not know is that there are many things of a constructive, Black-Power nature going on in the black communities. These things are not just rhetoric — in articles or on platforms — but are actual developments.

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He does not discuss the burgeoning organizations of black teachers (the Chicago group is known as the Association of Afro-American Educators) around the country who are developing a sense of Black Consciousness and meeting and talking and planning ways they can be relevant to the education of black children in the ghettos. He does not discuss the all-day session of black middle-class professionals (approximately 371) who met on January 20, 1968, in a South Side Chicago church (accountants, teachers, social workers, lawyers, doctors, etc.) to map ways they can bring their skills to bear on the development of the black community. And he does not mention how these various groups and people "tune in" to the language of Stokely Carmichael and the book Carmichael wrote on *Black Power* with this writer. Duberman does not mention these things because he and a lot of other white ghetto-watchers are probably not aware of these phenomena. They see only the overt activity. But everything that happens does not take place in front of white reporters, television cameras (neither newspaper reporters nor TV networks were invited or present at the two meetings described above) and at mass, open rallies. Blacks are meeting in their own private black caucuses and taking care of business. Thus, when some of us see white journalists and social scientists pontificating about Black Power, we conclude that they are still operating where they have been for ever so many years vis-à-vis the black community — from a vantage point of incomplete information. If Duberman knew of many of the things taking place, he would probably not raise some of the meaningless questions he raises in his article.

Likewise, he accuses Black Power advocates of being rather oblivious to historical centralizing trends in the country. This is not true! What many (keep in mind, he already admitted the diversity of Black Power opinions) of us who style ourselves as Black Power advocates see is that we have both centralization and decentralization taking place. We have no intention of trying to stem the flow of centralism; but at the same time we recognize the need to come to terms with the broadened base of sociopolitical participation at the local level. We propose to create new viable structures which will link centralization with decentralization. These new structures (which some of us see as necessary for drifting, valueless middle-class whites as well as for blacks) will establish legitimacy, restore trust and overcome alienation. Only in this way will the centralized institutions of decision-making have meaning, will the cities stop blowing up. Black people cannot afford, nor do they need to engage in, the pessimism of some whites. (Note, Duberman: "The two [big government and big corporations], in happy tandem, are moving the country still further along the road to oligopoly, militarism, economic

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imperialism and greater privileges for the already privileged. The trend is so pronounced, and there is so little effective opposition to it, that it begins to take on an irrevocable, even irreversible, quality.") Black Power people are not idealistic; rather, they have enough energy and courage and confidence to take on such formidable forces. Instead of constantly moaning, it would behoove some whites to engage themselves in the meaningful struggle. One of the problems we noted with many white students who went South to "help" the poor blacks in the delta and the black-belt was that the former were too quick, frequently, to opt out of the struggle. They were on the run from sterile, irrelevant middle-class white America, and they rendered themselves useless, in many instances, by their inability to come to grips with the bare harshness and embedded racism of the society. The southern blacks had no illusions about this; they knew the struggle was intense — and they are still there engaged in it, while many of the white students are off plucking flowers and tuning out. Perhaps this is what James Forman of SNCC meant at the 1967 National Conference of New Politics convention in Chicago when he said: "We will liberate you (the whites) too."

Duberman mitigates the Lowndes County, Alabama, episode. This we see as a viable way to link up black people to the federal government. Only when black people are able to control their local communities (wherever they can) can they begin to relate in a meaningful way with the federal OEO and HUD and HEW. This is the plan; this is the hope. It is *not* a matter of pitting little black Lowndes County *against* the national monolith. No, if the white decision-makers and their constituents are not willing, ultimately, to effect a viable rapprochement in this way, then the decision is white America's to make. *They* hold the key to further chaos and possible apartheid. But if they opt for this, let no one — white or black — be sanguine that whites can maximize *their* civil liberties. It is clearly in white America's self-interest to come to terms with the legitimate demands of black America and Black Power.

This brings us to the point of the new sense of worth and pride developing in the black community. Not nearly enough attention is paid to this aspect of Black Power by commentators. The concept has been the focal point for countless black people to reassess their role as black people in a white racist society. Black Power unequivocally calls into question values which relegate the black man to a position of subordinance, values which require black people to deny themselves in order to be "integrated." Black Power emphasizes the culture and heritage of black Americans, and Duberman gives only passing mention to this. Some have suggested that this emphasis on "blackness" could

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develop into racism. The record should be clear that racism has as its object the subjugation of another group. This is *not* what Black Power seeks.

Finally, Duberman's article indicates that much of the Black Power rhetoric is reminiscent of laissez faire conservatism (Herbert Hoover or Booker T. Washington) with its emphasis on self-reliance and self-worth. This is not entirely incorrect. What we see in much of the Black Power position is a combination of a little of Booker T. Washington (self-help and cast down your buckets where you are) and a lot of W. E. B. DuBois (militant insistence on equal rights and the development of a Talented Tenth). Anyone who has worked with the black students' organizations growing throughout the country on college campuses will see this. Many whites understand this, but the shocking thing, I suspect, is that black people are beginning to adopt this approach — and are certainly beginning to be less concerned about what their good white friends write in articles in sophisticated journals.

The ultimate test will not be what we *say* in such journals, but what we *do* in our respective communities.

## Abbie Hoffman

"Black Power!" yells the seventeen-year-old as he kicks in the store window in Newark and grabs the TV set.

"Black Power!" says the chairman of Negroes for Wallace in Los Angeles.

"Black Power!" shouts Stokely, the international revolutionist.

"Black Power!" states a Negro slumlord in Harlem.

"Black Power!" explains a black craftsman in a self-help cooperative in McComb, Mississippi.

Black Power to me, as a young white radical, has no real meaning. The question should be directed to blacks. I am busy making my own revolution. I am busy building a new community. Within a year we have a society of our own, newspapers, stimulants, thought patterns, life styles, dress, religion, politics, language, family relationships, music and art. Some call us hippies, yippies, dropouts, runaways, free men, flower children. The name doesn't matter. We are here to stay. We have our own civil war.

If you are under eighteen in this country you literally are in bondage. In the Lower East Side and the Haight-Ashbury professional bounty hunters get a hundred dollars per runaway slave they return. The police bust crash-pads without search warrants, which are unneces-

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sary since runaways are held for parents or sent to a Youth House, which is not a technical arrest. We have an underground railway and give the young kids new clothes, some money, and send them off to the next stop. Last year the runaway rate in the country increased 18 per cent. White suburban life has become a prison as strong as any ghetto.

Ten thousand of our brothers are in jails across the country for smoking flowers. Police smash the heads of bongo players in the park. At liberal gatherings the host says "I am glad you brought your women, they are prettier than ours" and "you sure can dance." Longhairs are refused service in some restaurants. In schools they are often forced to cut their hair. Once while I was walking in Times Square some black guys shouted, "When you gonna get a bath?" "None of your business, Whitey," I shot back. We all had a good laugh. The incident reminded me of a talk I once had with a black militant who was bringing a truckload of guns up to Roxbury about a year ago. "What about me," I said, "are you going to shoot me?" I was a SNCC worker at the time. I had spent the past few years organizing in Northern ghettos, teaching Freedom School in the South and helping blacks build an economic alternative in Mississippi. He took a while to answer because we were close friends. "Yes, even you," he said. "Maybe if I saw your SNCC button I wouldn't, but when the shit hits the fan it's hard to see buttons. I'd just shoot anything white." It was then that I decided to let my hair grow long, and it's been growing ever since. Long hair makes us the new niggers. It gives us high visibility. It is a symbol of rejection of the old order. It is the first step towards building a new community. It is the first step in dropping out. Resistance to the military, careers, university bullshit, outmoded mores and split-level living is the next. It is the beginning of our revolution. Its outward manifestations are strange. It is not yet understood by most black people. One group is aspiring up and in, the other down and out. When they meet there is friction and confusion. That is to be expected, but the friction will pass; the police will see to that.

Diggers bring eleven trucks of food to Newark during the riot. Longhairs in Detroit burned cars during that insurrection. Puerto Ricans and blacks joined massive pot Smoke-Ins in Tompkins Square Park. Everybody eats the free food served in the parks and gets clothes at the free stores. The Jade Companions raised money for Rap Brown's bail fund and the Visiting Mothers, a Puerto Rican group, joined our protest over the capture of four runaways. Meanwhile, according to the *New York Times* of October 5th, the Army demonstrates riot control tactics to three thousand police officials at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. The rioters are "dressed as hippies." In Sunnyvale, California, on Christmas

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Day, longhair Daniel Brown, age nineteen, attacked a police car naked while brandishing a sword. He was shot dead. It was not so long after Huey Newton, head of the Black Panther Party in nearby Oakland, shot a policeman. The styles are different but the goals the same. Both Daniel Brown and Huey Newton wanted freedom. What is this thing called Freedom? What meaning does it have for young whites in America as it is screamed from the steps of Sproul Hall or murmured at tribal council meetings in an incense-filled room on the Lower East Side. Freedom is the right to stand on the streetcorner and do nothing. Freedom is no censorship. Freedom is an end to poverty. Freedom is love. Freedom is having fun. Freedom is an end to the draft. Freedom is the abolition of property. Freedom is burning money. Freedom is the end of work. Our goal is full unemployment. Our vision is the free society.

Step one: a guaranteed annual income. Demands for more jobs, traditionally seen as the answer to ghetto poverty, are outdated. Our technology has unrealized potential for expansion. The little training now going on in the ghetto is for jobs that are already obsolete, hence meaningless. A guaranteed annual income is a transitional step toward a free society. Next: rent, food and medical care. Services such as telephones, transportation, utilities, will follow. And finally free art, free entertainment, free news. Goods to satisfy the needs of men. Society as a whole will move from issue orientation to problem-solving. The question then becomes: How do we construct our vision? Finally we will do away with money. Allen Ginsberg, in the poem *America*, writes, "When can I go into the supermarket and buy what I want with my good looks?" while in Cuba, Castro announces "the goal of our society is the abolition of money." We need to work towards that vision if we as people both black and white are to survive the collapse of the Empire. Cries of black power, student power, flower power, will peck at the guts of a cancerous system while guerrilla power chops at its tentacles abroad. There will be riots, drop-outs, disruption and foreign wars the government cannot win. We will have our own war of liberation, and the young, if we survive, will build the Free America.

## Tom Kahn

Is it not remarkable that so much effort is devoted to the exegesis of a slogan? One would think the phrase "Black Power" had an independent existence, a substance and dynamic of its own. Yet words are presumably invented to indicate preexisting things; and at least in politics, slogans have typically arisen as popular condensations

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of preexisting ideas. (People may have disagreed on how "Bread and Land" or "Forty Acres and a Mule" or even "Freedom Now" were to be precisely achieved, but the idea was clear enough.) Now we have a slogan for which we must find meanings, a form in search of content. It is perhaps a sign of the times, this reversion to magical symbolism. The new route takes us beyond protest, around politics, to incantations.

In the beginning, of course, were Stokely Carmichael and his followers chanting the words on the Mississippi March. Since then, "Black Power" has been echoed by different people for different reasons. What we should really be talking about is who these people are, what they want and how they propose to get it. These are the considerations that, interacting with the response of white America, will determine the actual, concrete meaning of "Black Power."

There is space here only for some assertions and a few comments on Martin Duberman's perceptive article.

1) The ambiguity which Mr. Duberman notes in "Black Power" stems in my opinion less from press distortion of SNCC and CORE statements than from the slogan having become a grab-bag for diverse tendencies within the Negro movement. (No doubt the mass media have not done justice to the full range and complexity of Rap Brown's philosophy; still, when his pronouncement on nearly every social problem is "Better get you some guns," little room is left for further distortion.) The difficulty is that "Black Power" now embraces: would-be guerrilla warriors *à la* Frantz Fanon and Che Guevara; advocates (in Christopher Lasch's words) of "traditional 'nationalist' measures ranging from cooperative businesses to proposals for complete separation," many of whom are associated with CORE; various Negro intellectuals and professionals in whom the degree of integration we have achieved has induced an identity crisis; old-line politicians who see in "Black Power" a potential instrument for erecting or shoring up ghetto machines; small businessmen seeking to enter, preserve or expand all-black markets; preachers who have long held their black congregations together with sermons about self-help and "the chosen people"; artists, actors and entertainers who are exploring the Negro's history and culture for new forms of expression; etc.

2) Obviously, some facets of "Black Power" can be absorbed by this society; they conform with our tradition and value structure. In this category are the emphasis on self-help and the tacit acceptance of segregation. Other facets will be nominally accepted but really undermined. Thus, Negroes will be encouraged to open small businesses, while the trend will be toward more big business consolidation and domination; Negroes will be given increasing control over ghetto education and poli-

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tical machines, while the power and resources continue shifting to suburbia and the Federal government. Like Booker T. Washington, who urged Negroes to stay in the South and acquire handicraft skills when industrialization and urbanization were the national trends, some "Black Power" advocates may be described by future historians as Uncle Toms.

Finally, there are the elements of "Black Power" that clearly cannot be absorbed. Whether one sees the ghetto uprisings as riots or rebellions, they will be stopped. The right to overthrow a government may be proclaimed by revolutionaries, but the right to suppress rebellion is claimed and, more importantly, exercised by governments. And in the United States it would be suppressed with the support of the overwhelming majority of the population and with a show of force commensurate with the magnitude of the threat. If in addition to violence and anti-white racism "Black Power" becomes identified with Maoism, Castroism or support of the Vietcong, the threat will loom plausibly larger in the sights of most Americans. How they react will ultimately prove more important, like it or not, than all the finely woven interpretations, redefinitions and elaborations of "Black Power" now being offered. Unfortunately a democrat, no matter how frustrated, cannot simply snub his nose at the sluggish and benighted majority; or, if he does, he may win a few battles but will surely lose the war.

3) Within "Black Power" we may find a thousand subtle and tantalizing questions bearing on the human condition, but the overriding question is what are we going to do. And the fundamental choice before us is this: will we undertake the massive social reform that is required to make room for the Negro on the basis of equality, or shall we rather encourage the Negro community to turn inward, seeking internal moral reformation and economic uplift within the bounds of segregation?

The latter approach, incidentally, is not only sanctioned by our traditions but also lends itself precisely to the conservative piecemeal approach to social problems that characterizes the "pragmatic" American spirit. Foundation grants can substitute for social investment by government; planning can focus on clearly delineated little neighborhood boxes, instead of on metropolitan and national arrangements. The trouble with this, as Mr. Duberman points out, is that "many of the basic ills from which Negro-Americans suffer . . . are national phenomena and require national resources to overcome," and that "whether these resources will be allocated in sufficient amounts will depend . . . on whether a national coalition can be formed to exact pressure on the federal government. . . ."

4) What should be the character of this coalition, and what forces should it comprise? The Black Power advocates feel, in Mr. Duberman's

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words, that "the only kind of progressive coalition that can exist in this country . . . is the mild, liberal variety which produced the civil rights legislation of recent years. And that kind of legislation has proven itself grossly inadequate." Mr. Duberman then suggests that: "If a radical coalition could be formed in this country, that is, one willing to scrutinize in depth the failings of our system, to suggest structural, not piecemeal, reforms, to see them executed with sustained rather than occasional vigor, then Black Power advocates might feel less need to separate themselves and to concentrate on local marginal successes. But no responsible observer believes that in the foreseeable future a radical coalition on the Left can become the effective political majority. . . ."

I want to concentrate on these statements and their implications because I believe they explain, at least in part, why Mr. Duberman's essay, like Christopher Lasch's also brilliant piece, "The Trouble with Black Power," in *The New York Review of Books*, finally leaves me unsatisfied. Rightly critical of the inadequacies of recent liberal legislation, yet pessimistic as to radicalism's immediate prospects, both writers deliver a surefire indictment of the society, then walk off leaving us stranded, with nowhere to turn. Maybe there is no place to turn, in which case the most incisive critiques of Black Power are pointless; if there are no serious alternatives, we might as well let everybody do his own thing. But I do not think we have reached this impasse.

Mr. Duberman lists several examples of the failures of the liberal legislation produced in recent years — e.g., despite the Supreme Court decision, 85 per cent of Negro students in the South are still in segregated schools; unemployment among Negroes has risen in the past decade; Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act has been poorly enforced; and so has the 1965 Voting Rights Act. This is all true, and the list could be extended. But surely one cannot argue — although Mr. Duberman may underestimate the radical impact of the Voting Rights Act — that this list defines liberalism's program, that these results flow from liberalism. They flow rather from the frustration and undermining of liberal programs by an entrenched and now resurgent conservatism.

5) To recognize this does not mean that liberalism, if it were decisively to defeat conservatism, would be sufficient for all our problems. As a socialist, I do not believe that. But neither would I want to fall into the error of earlier radical movements that declared socialism the precondition for full employment, the elimination of Jim Crow and other goals now widely recognized as attainable under liberal capitalism. To assume that liberalism has spent itself when in fact it has not yet come into its own — for an array of historical reasons — is to establish a premise that can only lead radicalism into vastly mistaken strategies. For one thing, it confuses liberalism's ideals with what is left of them

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after their confrontation with conservatism. Simultaneously, radicalism claims for itself what liberalism promised before the confrontation. Radicalism becomes chaste liberalism or triumphant liberalism, instead of a qualitatively different politics.

In any case, I am not convinced that a *radical* coalition, as desirable as that surely is, is required to achieve what the liberal coalition has sought, but failed, to achieve. If the liberal coalition, as powerful and respectable as it is, cannot desegregate hospital facilities receiving federal funds, what hope is there at present for a radical political majority in the United States? None, as Mr. Duberman says. From a premature breakdown of liberalism we are more apt to get reaction than radicalism. Only as liberalism triumphs over conservatism does radicalism become a relevant option.

Yet one finds among many New Leftists and some older intellectuals a kind of glee in viewing the fragmentation and weakening of the liberal coalition, as if a radical movement stood ready in the wings to take over. They see Vietnam as a crucible in which the excess fat of liberalism is boiled away, leaving hard crystals of political purity—for tomorrow. Of these people, as of SNCC and CORE, we may wonder with Mr. Duberman "whether they are really interested in a future reconciliation." But whether they are interested or not, political events are moving too rapidly for anyone to be confident of the political configurations two, five or ten years from now.

6) Radicals today should be working with and within the liberal coalition despite differences over Vietnam, for disintegration of the coalition will neither enhance the prospects of peace nor move us toward a more democratic foreign policy. Indeed the prospect of a more democratic foreign policy hinges largely on winning the mass domestic interest-based constituencies to the view that peace depends on the extension into international affairs of progressive social and economic policies at home. This process is not accelerated but retarded by a rhetoric which counterposes domestic and foreign policies by proclaiming that domestic social needs must await a peaceful settlement in Vietnam. Superficially this line appears to link domestic and foreign policy issues, but in reality it tends to isolate the Doves who employ it from the day-to-day struggles of those who cannot afford to wait for peace in Vietnam or to transfer their energies exclusively to that end. It does no good to tell residents of the ghetto that the war in Vietnam makes help for them impossible, which is what the conservatives are saying. It makes more sense to say what is after all the truth: that the war provides only the latest in a long succession of phony conservative excuses for defaulting on the nation's promises.

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The arguments of *The Freedom Budget* persuade me that, with full utilization of our economic resources and with appropriate fiscal policies, this country can afford both a war in Vietnam, *should we choose to pursue it*, and a war on poverty. To argue the incompatibility of the two "wars" on economic grounds is to obscure a basic political issue: the resistance of the affluent middle classes to heavier taxation. The cutbacks in poverty programs are attributable less to Vietnam than to class relations and the way they influence the distribution of political power in the United States. These relations were not forged in Vietnam, and they will not be altered there. To focus on Vietnam as *the* obstacle (at least economically) to domestic progress is to let a lot of privileged people off the hook.

Meanwhile, I suspect that the same future historians who will see in "Black Power" a reversion to Booker T. Washington's philosophy will see an equally ironic parallel between those who today would tie the Negro's liberation to peace in Vietnam and those in the early Socialist movement who saw the "Negro question" as simply a phase in the class struggle. Like the case for the existence of the class struggle then, the case for a peaceful settlement in Vietnam now is sufficiently cogent without appending the "Negro question" as a tail to its kite. Now as then it is a question demanding attention and action in its own right.

7) Aside from the probability that this war, like most, tends to bring domestic violence to the surface, the Vietnam war has affected the ghetto more indirectly than directly. By dividing the liberal movement and giving excuses to the conservatives, it has made massive new programs less likely. And by intensifying feelings of powerlessness, alienation and guilt among many white liberals, it has increased their emotional vulnerability to the most extreme Black Power denunciations and accusations. (After all, if you are seriously entertaining the thought that the white American government is committing genocide in Vietnam, then is it not conceivable that. . . .)

It is by no means clear that the domestic stalemate will be broken when the war in Vietnam ends. A slowdown in the war on poverty and racism was evident before the Vietnam escalation, and the danger is that peace in Vietnam would bring added problems of employment and conversion with which the nation may not be politically prepared to cope. We have a better chance if the liberal coalition is still around and if it is united on a far-reaching program of social and economic reconstruction.

8) In this connection, I think Mr. Duberman makes a serious mistake in writing off the bulk of the organized labor movement, a

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practice which the Vietnam crisis has made all the more fashionable. *Partisan Review* might someday consider a symposium analyzing the labor movement's foreign policy positions, but the fact is that right now the labor movement as a whole—and not simply the UAW and the UFT—has by far the most advanced economic policies of any major institution in American life. This has the ring of a thirties' cliché, but it happens to be true, as anyone who takes the trouble to read the publications of the AFL-CIO or to familiarize himself with its legislative campaigns can easily discover. There is much to be criticized in the labor movement, but no liberal coalition with muscle and staying power can be constructed apart from it. Had the liberal intellectuals of recent years absorbed more of labor's concern with full employment, higher wages, expanded housing construction and increased federal spending for social purposes, instead of so often portraying the nation's problems as cultural, legal and aesthetic, the gap between "white liberalism" and the ghetto might not be so wide as it now appears. I am at a loss to understand why Mr. Duberman excludes most of organized labor from the coalition but embraces "unskilled, ununionized laborers," unless he means to suggest that some political virtue resides among the unskilled and unorganized and that this virtue is contaminated by unionization. Here I fear Mr. Duberman may have succumbed to New Left romanticism. I am also skeptical of the progressive role he assigns to "new class technocrats," in whom I detect strong and dangerous currents of elitism. In glorifying this class, many New Leftists (I do not include Mr. Duberman) are disclosing more about their own class connections and semi-conscious ambitions than about the dynamics of social change. The proletariat having failed, history, they seem to say, has a new agent.

I doubt it.

## William Melvin Kelley

Is it still necessary, in 1968, to discuss the differences between the two peoples, African and European, who inhabit the United States?

I thought everybody accepted those differences. I thought that everybody knew the difference between James Brown and Elvis Presley, or Willie Mays and Mickey Mantle, or the waltz and the guaguanco, or the Temptations and the Beatles, or Leontyne Price and Joan Sutherland, or Duke Ellington and Aaron Copeland or even old Nat Turner and Mr. Jefferson Davis. And so I did not think we had to leaf back to Chapter One. But we do.

Please, sir, we are different, sir.

Our ancestors came from Africa, yours from Europe. Our ancestors

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did not want to come to the United States, yours did. Once we arrived in the United States, yes, we both worked — but separated from each other. We did not mix. You remained, essentially, a European people. We remained an African people.

We remained African because in Africa we had possessed a complex and highly-developed oral tradition. Knowledge — of the past, of the environment, artistic traditions, philosophy, myth, cuisine — was passed from one generation to the next, orally.

For the most part, we did not have written languages, books. You had books, libraries, where knowledge of the past, the environment, artistic traditions, philosophy, myth and even cuisine was boxed, packaged, stacked, catalogued, categorized, entombed and enshrined. In books. You must have money to get into such places, to study books, to buy books. Everybody cannot do it.

Many more people talk than write. Many more people hear and see than read. And we, those of us whose ancestors came from Africa, we had, still have, an oral tradition.

Unlike many immigrants, we did not suffer the shock of being separated, by English, from languages which were both oral and written. We were torn only from spoken cultures.

We missed the sounds of each of our languages, but the content, its meanings, stayed with us. An important aspect of our African cultures was the strong emphasis on Improvisation. Improvisation, in many different forms, is common to all of Africa.

In the United States, we improvised. An African, a grown man, taken in battle or kidnapped, marched to the coast in chains, forced onto a ship, carried across an ocean, unloaded, sold and told, finally, that he must pick somebody else's cotton, such a man had better improvise.

He did. We all did. We improvised on English. We improvised on Christianity. We improvised on European dress. We improvised on European instruments. We improvised on European games.

Orally. An African woman may have learned to cook her owner's dinner the way he liked it, but when she cooked her own food, she added a little pepper, as she had done in Africa. And that's the food she fed her children, or the African children she was feeding. And she taught the girls to cook that way, the old way. And those girls taught their girls. Orally. To our day.

We talked. We improvised. And our ancestors came from Africa. That is why you cannot compare James Brown to Elvis Presley, or the Temptations to the Beatles, or Duke Ellington to Aaron Copeland, or even the Black Power Movement to the Abolitionists and the Anarchists.

We are different.

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## Norman Mailer

Allow a symposiast to quote from himself. The following is out of a new book called *The Armies of the Night.*

> Not for little humor had Negroes developed that odd humorless crack in their personality which cracked each other into laughter, playing on one side an odd mad practical black man who could be anything, wise chauffeur, drunken butler, young money-mad Pullman Porter, Negro college graduate selling insurance — the other half was sheer psychopath, rocks in the ice-cube, pocket oiled for the switchblade, I'll kill you Whitey, burn baby, all tuned to a cool. These Blacks moved through the New Left with a physical indifference to the bodies about them, as if ten Blacks could handle any hundred of these flaccid Whites, and they signaled to each other across the aisles, and talked in quick idioms and out, an English not comprehensible to any ear which knew nothing of the separate meanings of the same word at separate pitch (Maoists not for nothing these Blacks!) their hair carefully brushed out in every direction like African guerrillas or huge radar stations on some lonely isle, they seemed to communicate with one another in ten dozen modes, with fingers like deaf and dumb, with feet, with their stance, by the flick of their long wrist, with the radar of their hair, the smoke of their will, the glide of their passage, by a laugh, a nod, a disembodied gesture, through mediums, seeming to speak through silent mediums among them who never gave hint to a sign. In the apathy which had begun to lie over the crowd as the speeches went on and on, (and the huge army gathered by music, now was ground down by words, and the hollow absurd imprecatory thunder of the loudspeakers with their reductive echo — you must FIGHT . . . *fight* . . . fight . . . fite . . . ite . . . , in the soul-killing repetition of political jargon which reminded people that the day was well past one o'clock and they still had not started) the Blacks in the roped-in area about the speaker's stand were the only sign of active conspiracy, they were up to some collective expression of disdain, something to symbolize their detestation of the White Left — yes, the observer was to brood on it much of the next day when he learned without great surprise that almost all of the Negroes had left to make their own demonstration in another part of Washington, their announcement to the press underlining their reluctance to use their bodies in a White War. That was comprehensible enough. If the Negroes were at the Pentagon and did not preempt the front rank, they would lose face as fighters; if they were too numerous on the line, they would be beaten half to death. That was the ostensible reason they did not go, but the observer wondered if he saw a better.

There is an old tendency among writers of the Left when apologists for one indigestible new convulsion or another — they go in for a species of

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calculated reduction which attempts to introduce comfortable proportions into historic phenomena which are barbaric, heroic, monstrous, epic and/or apocalyptic. (*New Republic* and *Nation* writers please stand!) So we may remember there was never much of a famine in the Ukraine, just various local dislocations of distribution; never real Moscow trials, rather the sort of predictable changing of the guard which accompanies virile epochs of history. The American labor unions were never really in danger of leaving the Left, just being led down the garden path by unscrupulous but limited leadership. Et cetera. So forth.

Now, Black Power. We are bound to hear before we are done that Black Power is merely a long-due corrective for premature and administratively betrayed efforts at integration — an indispensable period of self-development which will result in future integrations at a real level.

Like all such Left perspectives, it is wishful, pretty, programmatic, manipulable by jargon, and utterly stripped of that existential content which is indispensable to comprehending the first thing about Black Power.

The first thing to say, pretty or no, is that the Negro (that is the active volatile cadres of every militant Negro movement, SNCC, Black Muslims, etc., plus those millions of latently rebellious black masses behind them — which is what we will refer to when we speak of the Negro), yes, this Negro does not want equality any longer, he wants superiority, and wants it because he feels he is in fact superior. And there is some justice on his side for believing it. Sufficiently fortunate to be alienated from the benefits of American civilization, the Negro seems to have been better able to keep his health. It would take a liberal with a psychotic sense of moderation to claim that whites and Negroes have equally healthy bodies; the Negroes know they have become on the average physically superior, and this *against all the logic of America's medical civilization* — the Negroes get less good food ostensibly, no vitamins, a paucity of antibiotics, less medical care, less fresh air, less light and sanitation in living quarters. Let us quit the list — it is parallel to another list one could make of educational opportunities vs. actual culture (which is to say — real awareness of one's milieu). The Negro's relatively low rate of literacy seems to be in inverse relation to his philosophical capacity to have a comprehensive vision of his life, a large remark whose only support is existential — let us brood, brothers, on the superior cool of the Negro in public places. For the cool comes from a comprehensive vision, a relaxation before the dangers of life, a readiness to meet death, philosophy or amusement at any turn.

Commend us, while we are on lists, to the ability of the Negro to

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police himself, as opposed to the ability of the White to police others. At the Civil Rights March on Washington in 1963 with over a hundred thousand Negroes in town, no episodes of violence were reported — in the riots in the years which followed, fascinating patterns of cooperation among the rioters emerge. One may look, as Government commissions do, for patterns of a plot; or one may do better to entertain the real possibility that the Negroes have psychic powers of mass impromptu collaboration which are mysterious, and by that measure, superior to the White.

What the Negro may have decided at this point, as Black Power emerges, is that he has gotten the worst and the least of civilization, and yet has been able to engage life more intensely. It is as if the cells of his body now know more than the white man — so his future potentiality is greater. Whether this is true, half-true, or a species of madness is beyond anyone's capacity to know in this year, but the psychological reality is that breaking through his feelings of vast inferiority, a feeling of vast superiority is beginning to arise in the black man, and the antennae of this superiority lead not to developing the Negro to a point where he can live effectively as an equal in white society, but rather toward developing a viable modern culture of his own, a new kind of civilization. This is the real and natural intent of Black Power; not to get better schools, but to find a way to educate their own out of textbooks not yet written; not to get fair treatment from the police, but grapple instead with the incommensurable problem of policing one's own society — what will black justice be? Ergo, not to get a fair share of hospitals, but an opportunity to explore Black medicine, herbs in place of antibiotics, witchcraft for cancer cures, surgical grace with the knife in preference to heart transfers. In parallel: not to get into unions, but to discover — it is far off in the distance — black notions of labor, cooperation, and the viability of hip in production methods; not housing projects, but a new way to build houses; not shuttle planes, but gliders; not computers — rather psychic inductions.

Black Power moves then, obviously, against the technological society. Since the Negro has never been able to absorb a technological culture with success, even reacting against it with instinctive pain and distrust, he is now in this oncoming epoch of automation, going to be removed from the technological society anyway. His only salvation, short of becoming a city brigand or a government beggar, is to build his own society out of his own culture, own means, own horror, own genius. Or own heroic, tragic, or evil possibilities. For there is no need to assume that the black man will prove morally superior to the white man. Schooled in treachery, steeped in centuries of white bile, there are avalanches

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and cataracts of violence, destruction, inchoate rage and promiscuous waste to be encountered — there is well a question whether he can build his own society at all, so perverse are the conduits of his crossed emotions by now. But the irony is that the White would do well to hope the Black can build a world, for those well-ordered epochs of capitalism which flushed the white wastes down into the black heart are gone — the pipes of civilization are backing up. The irony is that we may even yet need a black vision of existence if civilization is to survive the death chamber it has built for itself. So let us at least recognize the real ground of Black Power — it is ambitious, beautiful, awesome, terrifying, and has to do with nothing so much as the most important questions of us all — what is man? why are we here? will we survive?

## Jack Newfield

Last July, on the third day of the Newark riot, high on marijuana, I watched films of the carnage on television, with the sound off, and the stereo blasting accidentally ironic counterpoint by Bob Dylan. As the spasms of police and National Guard brutality splashed across the TV screen, Dylan whined. . .

*"To live outside the law you must be honest. . . ."*
*"I'm on the pavement, thinking about the government. . . ."*
*"When you got nothin', you got nothin' to lose. . . ."*

When I came down, I picked up an academic study someone had sent me that revealed three out of every ten black schoolchildren in Roxbury, Massachusetts, had identified a drawing of a bear as a rat. Later, I made some phone calls to find out if I could do anything to help my SDS friends who were organizing in Newark. In that hour of McLuhanized apocalypse, the best I could do was get stoned and play Red Cross worker. I thought I was a radical, but I felt like Nero.

The intellectual theorists of the Black Power movement do not make much sense to me. I don't think America is in "a revolutionary situation." I don't think the guerrilla warfare ideas of Fanon or Debray are particularly relevant to a 90 per cent white, technological superstate. And I don't think the blacks inside America have a separate destiny from the whites; the military-industrial-labor complex is dehumanizing us all to an equal level of powerlessness.

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But none of that is really very important. The arguments are all vague and abstract. What is important, though, are the riots of the last four summers (twenty in 1964, eighty-two last year), and those to come this summer. For those riots have become the black underclass' only way, as Tom Hayden has pointed out, of entering and making history.

The studies now show that the rioters have not been the pawns of "outside agitators," the "criminal element," or "mad dogs," as Ronald Reagan baptized them. A two-year study of the Watts riot showed that 20 per cent of the ghetto — including the middle class — participated in the riot, and that 35 per cent approved, while an even larger group felt some community with the rioters. In Newark, government offers of rewards for turning in snipers were totally ignored.

What is most significant — and poignant — about the riots to me, is *not* that they are "a rehearsal for revolution," as Rap Brown says, but the exact opposite. They are a desperate cry for the most meager and conventional reforms — jobs, an end to police brutality, housing without rats, participation in community and municipal decision-making. That there were eighty-two recorded riots last summer is primarily a comment on the failure of two-party, representational democracy. The riots mean that jobs and dignity have become convulsive issues because the system has so atrophied it can't even provide elemental reforms.

But, finally, one cannot speak of Black Power, or the riots or even Vietnam, in a departmentalized vacuum. They are all part of something larger. We have permitted political power in America to pass from the people to a technological elite that manipulates the mass media and hoards nuclear weaponry.

Representational democracy has broken down. Neither party seems likely to nominate a critic of the war. Millions of southern Negroes are still disenfranchised by intimidation and illiteracy. Dozens of states are gerrymandered to favor rural, conservative constituencies. Vietnam strategy is made by Rusk, Rostow, Helms and Westmoreland — all bureaucratic appointees — while elected senators like Mansfield, Fulbright, Kennedy and McCarthy attack the war in vain. Adam Powell is purged from Congress, while Newark — 60 per cent black — has no black congressman. Congress itself is undemocratic because of the minority veto of the filibuster, and the seniority system which favors old, rural Southerners. Ordinary people can no longer affect national decisions through democratic levers. The riots are an ugly, but legitimate attempt, by the poor and powerless, to stretch democracy. We have given them no other way.

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## Fred Powledge

It is shocking to realize that more than one and a half years have gone by since Stokely Carmichael and his friends traveled along that road in Mississippi, shouting "Black Power" for the first time and suddenly making everything else in the movement, from loving nonviolence to white liberalism, a lot less relevant.

Even though the phrase has been defined so far in only the most emotional and general terms, it has changed everything we knew, or thought we knew, about race relations in America. Suddenly, it seemed, a lot of things that we had been calling progress looked foolish and old-fashioned, like yellowed family photographs of three decades ago. Suddenly we *knew* that Martin Luther King could go to Chicago, but that he soon would have to pull out. We *knew* that President Johnson could utter the magic words, "We Shall Overcome," but that there was nothing Washington could or would do, except send troops around the country when they are needed, that would have the slightest positive effect on race relations.

And we knew, too, that the period of truce was over, that an awful lot of Negroes had decided to stop being nicer than they really were. We adjusted to this, some of us who are white. We went into the peace movement, or maybe we dropped out entirely. We revised our vocabularies, removing the word "Negro" and replacing it with "black," and sometimes, when we wanted to show how well we understood the situation, we said "spade." We go to cocktail parties now, and we don't feel strange when we see only one Negro there, or no Negro there — in fact, when we see one we wonder what kind of Uncle Tom he is — and we talk with one another about the war in Vietnam, and about the need for a liberal coalition, and about the Warren Commission and about how we wish that Malcolm X were still alive, because he could help.

These are the fantasies to which we have been reduced, it seems: the belief that we really would end our problems at home if they would stop the war abroad; the belief that organized labor will somehow voluntarily practice what it preaches; the belief that two dead men, one a President with a sense of style, the other a black nationalist with a trace of optimism, could help us out of our national misery if they were alive now.

For those of us who are white, little has happened since the summer of 1966. Although Stokely Carmichael and his friends suggested to us, then, that there were things that whites could do, many of us have chosen to sit out the struggle as observers. We think it's nice that

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Carmichael wants neither domination nor exploitation, but "an effective share in the total power of the society," as he and Charles V. Hamilton defined it in their book, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America.* But many of the white liberals of yesterday, those who suffered themselves to be arrested alongside Dr. King in the South, seem to have given up without a fight.

There's a lot we could do. The Sheriff of Cook County wants a posse for next summer's riots. Radical and liberal volunteers, black and white, could turn it into a force for the preservation of justice, or at the very least try to keep it from becoming Tuscaloosa North.

We could stop talking so much about coalitions and finally form some, not one mimeograph machine that would purport to represent every white and black American to the left of Strom Thurmond, but dozens of coalitions that would have an influence over labor, business, housing, the judicial process, medicine, what's left of the poverty program, local politics, local school boards.

We need a coalition to keep an eye on the daily press, to make sure it doesn't mistake Establishment handouts for actual accomplishments; we need to keep two eyes and both ears on Robert Kennedy. We need coalitions that can and will reward people like Mayor Lindsay of New York when they do the right thing and that will embarrass them when they do the wrong thing. We need a way, besides mass resignations, to remind the American Civil Liberties Union that it need not get hysterical and back out just when the other side starts playing dirty.

We need coalitions in places like Newark. Almost half the population of Newark is white; do City Hall and the police headquarters represent even those *whites'* feelings about how a city should be run? The Newark Community Union Project has been trying for years to bring participatory democracy to Newark; why must it continue to beg white liberals for the money it needs to stay alive?

Stokely Carmichael and his successor have not yet defined black power in any specific, workable way, but that is no reason why decent whites should sit on the sidelines and wait. Hundreds of black individuals and organizations around the country are working right now to build black institutions, ranging from small voting blocs with realistic horizons to cooperative grocery stores; there are numerous opportunities for whites to see if they can help without becoming obnoxiously paternalistic.

There are a couple of very good reasons why decent whites should not excuse themselves from the black power movement. Riots, of course, are one reason. If the white liberals retire for the duration, the con-

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frontations between angry Negroes and racist whites are going to become more and more bloody, and reprisals are going to be carried out on a nondiscriminatory basis. And the white liberals are going to suffer as much as any other group of whites.

There is also the fact that if the white liberals remain in seclusion, they are going to wake up one morning and find that they, as well as the Negroes, have no power. There will be sheriff's posses in every county, North and South, and everybody in uniform will have a can of Mace that he's itching to use on the enemy.

George Wallace might not be in the White House, but the man who will be there may not be much better. Full-page ads in the *Times* wouldn't help even if they could be published. There would be no place to go except underground, and white liberals have been too comfortable for too long to enjoy lives of *furtive* paranoia.

## Stephan Thernstrom

As Martin Duberman observes, "if Black Power means only that Negroes should organize politically and economically in order to develop self-regard and to exert maximum pressure," no civilized person can object to it, and I believe that even the more exotic and apocalyptic variants of the doctrine have had certain positive consequences, at least within the white liberal and black communities. However great the chaos and confusion of the present and the uncertainty about the future, the problem of the Negro is now at the forefront of public attention, and the irrelevance of much of the traditional civil rights program to the ghetto-dweller and the sharecropper is obvious to all. Only a few short years ago the view that the poverty and powerlessness of the ordinary Negro-American was the root of the race problem was confined to the radical fringe; now that diagnosis is widely accepted, and the focus of debate is on possible solutions. This dramatic shift is the product of a variety of circumstances, but the Black Power ferment is manifestly an important one.

It does not appear, however, that Black Power spokesmen have thought very coherently about strategies and programs to deal with the grievances they articulate. There are the demented few who play at revolution, but the dominant thrust of Negro protest today is toward

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a goal which is not too grandiose but too modest. This is the black community's quest for self-determination of its own affairs, which entails black control of such local institutions as school boards, the police, poverty program area councils, etc. It is easy enough to applaud this impulse, but we should not exaggerate the benefits which will flow from it. Advocates of self-determination characteristically hold a simplistic view of what constitutes power in a complex, industrial society. To put it baldly, the "power" attained by capturing local institutions offers little remedy for the economic deprivation and dependency of most Negroes today, and it is that deprivation and dependency which underlies the sense of powerlessness felt by so many Negro-Americans. A ghetto run entirely by blacks — "run" in the sense in which most Black Power theorists use the term — is a ghetto still, and the basic forces which determine the employment opportunities, housing, consumption patterns and education of its inhabitants are little modified by the change.

That this point has been so little heeded stems partly from the depressing fact that, while black control of the modest prizes traditionally up for grabs in American ethnic politics is clearly attainable in the near future in many places, broader changes in the distribution of wealth and power in American society are but remote possibilities, if possibilities at all. But there is another, less defensible, reason for the rather constricted vision of many Black Power advocates, namely their oddly romantic image of immigrant politics in the American past. For all of their cynicism about many aspects of the national mythology, prophets of ghetto self-determination naïvely accept current American folklore about how the Irish and their successors "made it" by capturing local political machinery and exploiting it for the benefit of the group.

In fact, this model of immigrant success is somewhat misleading historically, and even more misleading as applied to the contemporary metropolis. It is misleading historically in that the immigrant group which achieved the most dramatic political successes — the Irish — was exceptionally slow to enter the American mainstream, while groups which devoted less of their energies to local politics — the Japanese and Chinese, for example — were much quicker to acquire wealth, education and occupational status. The problem is complex, and it is important to recognize that Japanese and Chinese enclaves in the cities soon obtained a kind of autonomy which is still lacking in Harlem and Roxbury today. But those who insist that Irish Power is a happy precedent for Black Power need to reflect more critically about just what Irish Power did and didn't do for the Irish. It is currently fashionable to look back in nostalgia on the machines of old, their cogs oiled by a

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little honest graft, smoothly dispensing turkeys and city jobs to the deserving. In fact, however, these material rewards were spread less widely than legend would have it, and were probably less significant than the dubious psychic reward of having "one of our own boys" in high office. Classic ethnic politics thus redefined class grievances as ethnic grievances, and deflected attention away from structural arrangements which worked to the disadvantage of not only the Irish poor, but the Italian poor, the Negro poor, etc. It is perhaps a little less painful to be exploited by one's own kind, but the resulting diminution of pain seems to blur the vision and foster the safe status quo politics of the Boston Irish or the Providence Italians.

If the politics of ethnic pride and local self-determination were of doubtful benefit to the ordinary Irishman or Italian in the past, they offer even less to the Negro today, since blacks are gathering their forces to assault a citadel whose treasure will have been largely smuggled out before the defenses crumble. When the Irish captured the cities the central urban core was far more vital and valuable than it is today. The strangling of the mass transit system, the flight of industry, the suburban explosion, searing tax rates in the central city: these are all symptoms of a shift in the center of gravity of our civilization that promises to diminish steadily the resources triumphant big-city blacks will have any control over. And there is in addition the legal fact that American cities are creatures of the states, which leaves future state legislatures free to pursue the tactic of Yankee Massachusetts after the Irish takeover of Boston, namely to place such sensitive functions as policing the city in the hands of state-appointed officials.

A final observation is that earlier immigrant groups felt that they were making progress not only because they were indeed advancing themselves economically, politically and educationally, but also because they were soon followed by more recent newcomers upon whom they could look down. The Negro, however, is obviously not destined to be followed by a new underclass which might serve this function. There are still large pools of unskilled rural whites who will make the move to the city in the future, to be sure, but current studies of occupational mobility suggest that these whites will be making more rapid gains than Negroes.[1] Negroes are thus the first group in American history whose chief hope of getting off the bottom is not to stand on someone else's shoulders but to eliminate the bottom altogether. They have a

1 Peter M. Blau and Otis Dudley Duncan, *The American Occupational Structure* (New York, 1967), ch. vi.

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compelling motive to press, not simply for control over their own impoverished turf, but for such changes as a radically new approach to the distribution of employment and income which might, for example, set as its goal a situation in which no American family earned less than the median income (approximately $7,000 today). This would, of course, be equally in the interests of the white poor, though few of them now think in these terms.

Whether or not anything so wildly visionary has any political relevance depends largely, of course, upon men and institutions upon which neither Black Power spokesmen nor readers of *PR* have much influence. But clarity of purpose on the part of angry blacks and their white allies is surely of some value, and I suggest that mere self-determination *à la* the Irish model is a dangerously limited aim. If the prospects for larger changes which would benefit the American poor, black and white alike, are bleak, then the prospects for the Negro are bleak, and we had best face the fact and do what we can to alter it.

## Dr. Nathan Wright, Jr.

It is said that when the Emancipation Proclamation became legally effective on January 1, 1863, large numbers of those who had been enslaved went about their past routines of enslavement as though nothing new had happened.

Some former slaves took days, others took weeks and months, to become adjusted to the idea of freedom. The hope of freedom was one thing. Entering into its realization was another.

The experience portrayed here speaks in some crucial respects to our condition today. There are few in America who do not wish for life's fulfillment for all in this our beloved land. To will that men might have free access and encouragement toward becoming the best that they might be is one thing. Doing our part to bring about those adjustments in all of our human relationships which are necessary for freedom is another thing altogether.

Old ways, however sacred among our memories of the past and however sanctified by the encrustations of tradition, clearly have brought us to where we are today. Because we or our fathers have committed ourselves to a particular course of action with good intent is never

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a guarantee that what we have done is right. We must be always open to truth.

Social goals therefore are always tentative. They are—at their best—open to new dimensions of truth.

In a day of continuing change, such as we are facing in our nation from here on in, it is the romantic and the dogmatic and the doctrinnaire who have almost a written guarantee of being lost. We cannot afford to follow those who romanticize the condition of black people or who are dogmatic or doctrinnaire and who will hold on to old beliefs, come hell or high water; and we must save these kinds of people even from themselves.

In our immediate day, as we look at our racial tensions and at our urban distress, we must know that we cannot simply prescribe more of the same old things and still hope to be safe. Yet this is what we all too often do. If what we have adopted as a course of action fails, we often simply blame our failure on a lack of adequate resources. Far too often, we have overlooked the possibility that our strategy might be in need of change or even that our definition of our problem might be wrong.

We have, for instance, gone through what is clearly an aberration in the human experience by the adoption of a well-intentioned but unhistorical notion that whatever men do in reference to the needs of black men in America must be done interracially. We are now coming to realize—as our course of action has been accompanied by mounting doom—that there are *some* tasks which must be done interracially; and doubtless there needs to be far, far greater interracial cooperation. But not all things pertaining to the interests of black men can or need to be done in common by black and white. As with our families, some things we do together; others we do alone.

Some things white people must do as white people. If a man comes to his neighbor's house and offers a helping hand to get his neighbor's car out of the garage, this may seem at a glance to be a wholly worthwhile thing. But if the man has offered the help, together with the other residents of the neighborhood, has put roadblocks in the street so that the neighbor's car could get no farther than the driveway, then the situation is radically altered. What the friendly and well-intentioned neighbor must do, if he would be genuinely of help, is to get together with his other neighbors and remove the roadblocks which they shared in putting in the street. Some have reckoned that just the removal of the roadblocks by white people working together as white people to remedy what they as white people have done will take from five to ten years or more. I happen to be far more optimistic than that.

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The picture here should be evident. There are some things that white people themselves must do. They can and must take the initiative in removing the roadblocks which they, their ancestors, their relatives and their friends have placed — however unknowingly — in the paths of black people.

It is all too true that black men must help white people in gaining the new insights and acquiring the new and more effective motivation needed for the tasks which are primarily those for the white people of America to do. Practically every city and every major business enterprise in America has been arbitrarily white-purposed and white-controlled. This circumstance has been a precondition of the growing rebellions which may strike critically at the nation's heart. White people must take the leadership in changing white institutions, white attitudes and white traditions. This must be their primary field of missionary activity. And those white people who most would will that change might come, must recognize first and foremost that no man can be a change agent unless he has undergone change himself.

We cannot keep a hold on all the privileges of being white, and at the same time truly relate to the needs of black men. As the Rev. Richard Schoolmaster, Rector of Grace Church, Orange, New Jersey, has put it: no white person, however well-intentioned, can escape from the condition of riding the backs of black people; for every opportunity which every white man in America enjoys has been widened in some degree by the arbitrary exclusion in some degree of black people.

Thus it is that, in the nature of things, different roles and different responsibilities are placed upon different ones among us. This is true in a unique or critical way with respect to what black people have far too long overlooked in terms of what they alone can and must do for themselves.

One hundred years ago, again, Frederick Douglass said that the limits of oppression are never set by those who have power which is unchecked. Only and always the limits of oppression are set by those whom others, intentionally or unintentionally, would oppress.

We as black men must set for ourselves alone the limits of those opportunities which would be denied to us. We alone as black men must address ourselves to the issue of self-respect. It is clear that no one can fully respect another who does not first respect himself. The racism built historically into the nation's life has resulted in a cultural disdain for blackness. Black men, who have sought more than any others to be American, have all too often tended to outdo their fellow Americans in the cultural disdain for blackness.

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Men who build, albeit unconsciously, a tradition of self-hate, build a people who, hating themselves, will turn to destroying themselves, incidentally destroying all others. Black men and women and young people who cannot see and accept themselves as black, that is, for what they are defined in our culture as being, build unwittingly for doom.

Black men must see the good that God has given their glorious condition of blackness. Black is good and white is good but they are at their glorious best when white and black are to be found together in equity conjoined. Even here, we must recognize that "something" never coalesces with "nothing"; and that we as black people can at our best take into a common humanity only our unique integrity.

Black men have much to offer this nation's life, without which the nation cannot save itself from its charted self-destruction.

Black men have the critical insights which only the long-benighted can know. The historical role of the oppressed in every society has been to bring a sense of cleansing and regeneration to the society which has occasioned their oppression.

Black people must, therefore, become the "saving remnant" in our nation's life. Failing this, black men doubtless do not deserve the freedom which they seek.

Black men alone are responsible for the skewed relationships of power which have helped bring our nation to the brink of major disaster. In no circumstance—in our homes, our communities, our nation and our world—where there are not equitable relationships of power tension and extension can there be either morality or maturity. Black men must take the initiative in developing for themselves Black Power.

Residual power must be utilized by distinct individuals and groups in order to relate with power and command to others. It is not an end in itself. It is a necessary means to the end of cooperation, coalition and the unity which God wills for man. In this respect, thoughtful and responsible white people must take the initiative in facilitating the development of Black Power.

Not only then must we develop new awarenesses concerning what black men, what white men and what black men and white men together must do, but also we must come finally to understand some of the present perils of change.

Those who have been accustomed to seeing others as children tend to find it a traumatic experience when those whom they have come to see as children seek apparently suddenly to stand on their own. Parents are taken aback when their own children—whom they knew

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would grow up—suddenly seem to show signs of standing on their own. In this light, it would clearly be an exception to the human experience for white people—who as a group have nurtured black people for three hundred years, without the lively expectation of their immediately growing up—not to be taken aback by signs that black people are determined to stand on their own.

The puzzled view of white people, who close from their minds the saving necessity and positive good of power and self-respect for black men, will be a growing phenomenon with which we must live and reckon in the months and years which lie ahead. Ironically, they will be aped also in this circumstance by large numbers of black men who still hold on to the strange belief, unadmitted even by white men of only a little discernment; that is the peculiar black people's belief that "white makes right." Parents would will to be wise but all too few are wise. Parents and godparents resist the growing up of their children. White people have been like godparents to black people. We must come to accept their intention as an earnest for their needed deeds and help to lead into new understandings those whose goodwill must be informed far more rapidly by the changing experiences and insights of the new days which are upon us.

All of us must work together—in some respects discretely, in some respects in coalition—to meet the serious demands of the urgent times which we as a nation face.

Freedom will never come unless first our minds and hearts are free and open to new experience and new truth. Then, there must also be a firm commitment of the will in and under the new circumstances of each ever-changing day.

The late Dorothy Thompson wrote at the end of World War II that peace is not the absence of war but is a positive condition of justice. So it is with freedom. Freedom is not the absence of bondage but the perennial open response to truth. Indeed, one wiser than us all has said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

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## AN OPEN LETTER

As writers and educators, we are alarmed at recent attacks on the integrity and freedom of the academic community at the State University of New York at Stonybrook. By staging a deliberately spectacular raid on dormitories in the early morning hours of January 17, the police of Suffolk County acted in a way difficult to justify solely on the basis of the local government's concern for the observance of the law. Instead, their tactics seemed calculated to discredit the administration, intimidate the faculty, and frighten the students. Such a performance suggests that county officials were using the enforcement of the narcotics statutes as a pretext for expressing their hostility toward the University community. In striking contrast, the police showed a startling disregard for law on December 7 in failing to make arrests at all when construction workers on the campus assaulted members of the University peacefully demonstrating against the war in Vietnam.

Perhaps the most detrimental effect of the current legislative and judicial investigations is to jeopardize the trust and confidence that must exist between students and teachers in a university. The decision to subpoena eleven members of the faculty to testify, on matters involving the confidences received from students, before the Joint Legislative Committee on Crime, and the possible summoning of them before a Grand Jury can only work to undermine the unique relationships which are fostered by academic institutions. We are not asking that students be given special legal privileges, but we do believe that faculty members should not be pressured into betraying the confidences of students. The inviolability of trust between teachers and students is an essential aspect of academic freedom of inquiry, and the present crisis at Stonybrook dramatically illuminates the need to articulate and defend this principle and perhaps to afford it some form of legal recognition. We protest its subversion by officials of Suffolk County and the State of New York, and we fear its potential subversion elsewhere.

W. H. Auden
John Barth
Leo Bersani
Robert Brustein
Robert Coles
Verne Countryman
Frederick Crews
Martin Duberman
Ronald Dworkin
Richard Ellmann
Lillian Hellman
Irving Howe
Arthur Kinoy
Christopher Lasch
Harry Levin
Robert Lowell
Arno J. Mayer
Martin Peretz
William Phillips
Richard Poirier
Philip Rahv
Richard Schlatter
Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.
Susan Sontag
William Styron
William Taylor
Lionel Trilling

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## Norman Mailer

# UP THE FAMILY TREE

The book was the event of the season. Not, of course, as a huge best seller, or inspirative of awe or celebration — no suggestion in publishing ranks that Princess Margaret was doing her memoirs — this was more like the fraternity initiation of the year. A medium plump, very rich, and very late Freshman, bastard son of a founding family, was actually going to submit himself to an all-out hazing, and against all the advice of his furious family, furious to the point of biting their white icy lips (accustomed for years to no kisses but the most perverted!). One kissed the devil indeed, but no member of the family submitted to a hazing conducted by yahoos and muckers with names like Richler, Fuller, Bermel, Puso, Beam, or Predictable Hicks — what a squalid yard of humpty-beaters and hard-ons. No fate could prove undeserved for Norman said the family in thin quivering late night hisses. (For like every family which had kissed the tail of satan's cat — say it on! — the hole! they spoke after midnight in voices like snakes and beetles and rats, hiss and titter, prick and sip.)

Yet the hazing, while brutal — coarse, intimate, snide, grasping, groping, slavering, slippery of reference, crude and naturally tasteless — was still on the side of charity! if one compared the collective hooligan verdict to the earlier fulminations of the Inner Clan, yes, even if one had to face up in the reviews to such models of pig-sweat in aspic as the following: "a career expressed as a matchless 360 page ejaculation" — Bermel, *New Leader*; "The Egghead (I use the slightly dated term to lock Podhoretz in the persona he is so much at pains to discard)" — Raphael, *Sunday Times*; or Richler in *The Nation* — "deplorably inbred . . . intolerable show-biz characteristics . . . grubby details . . . careerist adventures. . . ." Yes, if pig-sweat, envy, anaemic sniper-hots and spite stand out in many a review as obviously as a Watusi shaking his feathers, the fact remains that the public reception of *Making It* with all its suffocating air, since no review was ready to call the book evil, or

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label it great, was nonetheless — all horrors of hazing in evidence — was nonetheless kinder to Podhoretz than the first kiss of the clan.

If *Time* and *Newsweek* (career men naked in their own homeland) hated *Making It,* why the *Times* was there on daily and Sunday to give it a good respectful word, so was *Life* — grace of the guest reviewer, John Aldridge. *The Nation, The New Republic,* and *The New Leader* spit (no doubt to show the very balls of integrity in daring to attack the editor of *Commentary* — who was there to say they were a veritable gang of undescended testes?) *The Wall Street Journal* was mild and Waspy, avuncular in its gentle sting — so was *Sat Review. The Progressive* came in swell. *Book World* was bitchy and bright, the *National Observer* offered objective notes of praise, the *Washington Post* was vitriolic: "egregiously phony" it said. *The Plain Dealer* called *Making It* fine reading. *Women's Wear* picked up its skirts and wooed with both feet in the air — "fascinating and appalling" her verdict. If the *Los Angeles Times* was whipping the heads off flowers, "sophomoric, humorless . . . constricted, shallow, contrived," the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* called *Making It* "a book, and a good one at that." Even the *New York Review* was left at the end of its long tether in bemusement: "we may surely hope that successive volumes will permit us to follow the career of this remarkable, still young man. And they may be more mellow; sometimes as we age, memory softens our perceptions of reality. In *Podhoretz Returns* and *Son of Podhoretz,* the monster may turn out to have a heart of gold." That was about the way it went. No, then it went worse! All the reviews were surpassed at the end by a draft-horse of a review in *Esquire,* ten thousand words and more by the fiction editor of the *Saturday Evening Post,* America's own Rust Hills, a prodigious many-nostrilled neigh of a report, here fair, there foul, often full of hay, designed to prove that Podhoretz was an enemy of the novel and Hills its first defender, the whole dominated by a series of nine caricatures of Podhoretz by David Levine so connotative of old nightmares in the pages of *Der Stürmer* that one was finally obliged to wonder what occult species was Levine and how ammonia-odored was the hand which held the drawing pen of such a crotch — did the fingers stink of crap or bat or pigeon's piss?

Well, no vast joy to be found in such reviews for the writer of a book, particularly when it is his first full-length book, and was written with high ambition and in the teeth of the shaking ague of confronting the highest literary standards all packed like blood-oaths and covenants in himself — one does not acquire love for literature at the feet of the Trillings and pay no price in outsize awe. Nor does one practice as an honorable literary critic for years, doing one's best by one's lights to

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cut the morbid anomalous tissues of ill-conceived work without starting in terror out of sleep at night at the thought of what groans and revenge are buried in the tombs of expired books — now shakes the hand of the critic-surgeon as he lifts his scalpel to — all ghouls awake — to sharpen his own creative pen for the expression of his own creative urge. Predictably, there will be New Leader Bermel to macerate the urge into "a matchless 360 page ejaculation." Yes, the bad breath of the future assassins can be smelled already in the wood.

Besides, the presumptive book-writer is an editor, and of a magazine which if not universally well-liked, is perforce everywhere respected. (Which is to say five hundred writers and spokesmen will never forgive the editor of *Commentary* for his tastes, choice, correspondence with them, exercise upon their manuscripts, or just general rejection of work, ideas, unholy passions. The editor is a man known for the solidity of his culture, the centrality of his position in the Liberal Establishment, the depth of his sanity, sense of proportion, and independence equal to no less than the feat of resurrecting a half-dead magazine; known as well for the power of his friends, the warmth of his own personality, the charm and brilliance of his wife, the lusty wit of his children, the modesty of his own self-effacing humor — the man is endowed; wisdom and worldliness are his; he has one foot in the stirrup of all good spirit, and the other is on the kneadables of the sweet ass of success. Who but a very brave or foolhardy man would in such a fine condition sit down to write any kind of book at all, who but a demented scribbler would choose to dive through the plate-glass window of his own splendid showcase in order to allow an outside mob of hungry assassins, literary gung-hos, and assorted rhinoceri to come roaring in to examine the goods with knives, feet and teeth. Who but a quivering whip-full of masochist would dare to end such a book with the following two paragraphs, one wretched for all of its moderate length, the other as indigestible in its brevity as a plastic peanut?

> For several years I toyed with the idea of doing a book about Mailer that would focus on the problem of success, but in the end I decided that if I ever did work up the nerve to write about this problem, I would have to do it without hiding behind him or anyone else. Such a book, I thought, ought properly to be written in the first person, and it ought in itself to constitute a frank Mailer-like bid for literary distinction, fame, and money all in one package: otherwise it would be unable to extricate itself from the locks of the dirty little secret. Writing a book like that would be a very dangerous thing to do, but someday, I told myself, I would like to try doing it.
>
> I just have.

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Yes, who could commit such a blunder of self-assertion, self-exposure, and self-denigration but my old dear great and good friend Norman Podhoretz who brings the mind of a major engineer to elucidating the character of complex literary structures but would seek — for such is the innocence of his good heart — to climb the Matterhorn on ice skates.

Now, of course, if Podhoretz' great and good friend Norman Mailer is to say this now, it is with wisdom which comes after the fact. For *Making It*, taken on its own terms, while never possessing a chance for real fame and real literary distinction (because of flaws to be yet discussed) is, seen by a dispassionate eye in manuscript or galleys (and no eye so dispassionate as the look of an old friend) is, *Making It* is, yes, a perfectly decent and honorable book very well written for much of its length, and respectably written for the rest except for ten or twelve isolated phrases, sentences, and paragraphs, so unhappy, ill-chosen, and aggressively flatulent that no reviewer with an eye to the cruel could fail to notice, and not even the kindest of critics would be ready to defend them. Small wonder that these miserable phrases crop up again and again in every review, thereby giving the impression of a graceless, malodorous, repulsive, offensive, self-aggrandizing work when in fact the overall style is — but for these scattered criminal lapses — a style restrained, cool, self-observant, modest, dispassionate, analytical and gifted with an agreeable variety of aperçus on matters such as status, class, privilege, and clan. It is an interesting book, very interesting in its way, and offensive not at all except for its precise lack of offensive threat, which irritates in about the way of any defenseless presentation. In summation its only thundering demerit is that it is not a great or major book, and it may be that nothing less was required for a literary venture by an Establishmentarian critic and editor in Podhoretz' position than to produce just such an overpowering work. Probably nothing less would have done. Instead, Podhoretz by a major effort of will against what must have been the rock-quaking tremors of his own heart, produced a minor work of much excellence, seriously flawed. It was doubtless an expensive book for the author — so much energy spent, so little fame; so much talk, so little good will; but great authors like great generals can be tempered by disastrous campaigns as well as victories; it is — wipe the old metaphor — exactly when an author begins to think not of the blow he will take to his own liver, but the shot he will deliver to the target, that he is ready for real literary game. Podhoretz is sufficiently sturdy, honorable, clear-eyed and talented to deserve the most thorough going-over, provided the attack is clean, and offers the dignity

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of a dispassionate critique, which of course is exactly what he did not get. So, let us go to look at *Making It*. Mysteries will confront us there, not the least being the exceptional hostility it aroused in the Establishment while the book was still in manuscript.

The Establishment has properties, not the first of which we might suggest, is its absolute detestation of any effort to classify or examine it. (Anyone doubting this last assertion is invited to recollect the out-size wrath of Jackie Kennedy at the modest inside anecdote or two of her life as told by William Manchester, a wrath whose overflow was to cost Bobby Kennedy ten points of national popularity in a year of great decision.) No, any sociologist who would attempt to analyze the Establishment would do well to begin with the assumption that it is a temple, and its members are priests and priestesses, its center of worship is a hole, a Holy of Holies, its altar undescribed. Power which is not material must dwell in mystery, its most refined codes are best left uncodified — indeed a scholar might hope to demonstrate that the Talmud could not be committed to writing until hope for the restoration of the Second Temple was lost; the intimations of such power are rarely verbal — they exist in the curve of an inhibiting eyebrow, the form of a line.

2.

Podhoretz, schooled as a critic at Columbia, then Cambridge, was to arrive in the pages of *Partisan Review* with a full set of preoccupations provided by Trilling, but his critical stance — solid, doughty, authoritative, and hugely egalitarian (this last to be explained in an instant) — owed much to Leavis. Leavis was, of course, a veritable monster of taste, a rabid hanging judge of the smallest literary pretense — he derived from a line who would behead the king if the king did not meet measure — but Leavis was nonetheless egalitarian: he obviously believed that the critic performing a thorough total work of scholarship, steeped in the traditions, lore, style, moral filaments and spiritual saps of the work he considered, alert in every quiver of his senses to the nuances and defections in the fabrication of beauty or power within the poem or prose before him was, if ready to make that total effort, a work of art in himself, a living critical creation face to face on equal terms with the work; so, hugely egalitarian.

Such total commitment can come only to an Englishman or a Bolshevik, come to them, that is, and remain. A young American can be steeped in such a discipline for a time, but there is no ballast in America for joining ideological priesthoods which offer no uniform. The only invisible American priesthood with ballast is the Establishment, and that is never ideological.

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But Podhoretz was ideological, ideological three times over, by Jewish Theological Seminary, Columbia, and Cambridge; any well-equipped mind passing through three such separate disciplines could hardly be expected to encounter future experience free of any set, liberated from preconceived stance.

To the contrary, Podhoretz like many an intellectual before him could use as his *cogito, ergo sum*: I cerebrate, therefore I see. No matter how sensuous the nature, sense experience in such men tends to become the raw material for the processing mills of new hypotheses. That is a superb way to do a kind of literary criticism, perhaps the best kind of literary criticism for which we can ask, since a work confronted by no critical hypothesis can merely be admired or despised, and thereby open questions of taste, but it cannot improve our mind by allowing us to consider simultaneously the work in question and the critical approach. We may enjoy the style of a critic who eschews hypotheses or we may reject it, but we cannot imbibe that deepening of context (that awareness of the work, the critic, and the world containing them both) which is the marrow, indeed the very satisfaction, of reading a critic who lays siege to a work with his hypothesis. The value of an hypothesis is that it can be tested, tested by the evidence of the work, tested by how much it fails to explain, tested indeed by the fact that it will remain as the best working hypothesis until a better one comes along to replace it. That is the most energetic kind of criticism, probably the most creative, and when done well, certainly the most stimulating to any reader who like Podhoretz lives in large part for the joy of cerebration. And Podhoretz is probably as good as any critic in America at this kind of writing. Indeed his only serious competitors might be Steven Marcus, John Aldridge and Irving Howe.

Emphasis has been put upon this kind of criticism because it is so quintessentially part of Podhoretz' way of writing, even his way of life (since *Commentary* more than any other comparable magazine attracts articles with hypotheses) that when he came to do a book it was natural for him to begin with an hypothesis. The only difficulty was that he was now dealing not with an aesthetic artifact but with himself, not with literary criticism but a species of narrative fiction which is much too quickly thought of as autobiography. That word is appropriate to use if we are considering what a man writes about himself after his career is more or less done — he is at that point less than he used to be, his possibilities are generally consumed, his externals are known, and he is probably in fair shape to see himself as others do, since his old age itself testifies to the fact that he could live with his legend much in the

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same manner others responded to it. By this logic, autobiography is obviously biography done by oneself, auto-biography — someone else could presumably have been as intimate with the material. But when a man writes a book about himself in the beginning or middle of his career, then his work if at all penetrating is not a biography so much as a special category of fiction, precisely because his choices for future career are still open, his possibilities remain numerous, his conflicts are as alive as his enemies, his feelings as tender as his friends, and his sense of himself is as confused, complex, even bewildered as his sense of others. So he must make that same creative abstraction from life that a novelist makes when he cooks up or conceives a character out of one or more people he partially comprehends. The character if successful comes to life, the character engages a series of events which he shapes, and fails to affect, and from his strivings the reader may draw some comprehension, even an hypothesis. If the reader is a critic he will measure the character by this hypothesis, and we as other readers will be aided in comprehending the character (let us say it is Leopold Bloom) by the critic's hypothesis, that is until a better or more fashionable hypothesis comes along.

Yet the character must first be created. If a man is writing an accurate narrative about himself with real people and their real names, and this narrative arises because some imbalance or pressure or obsession or theme persists in dogging the man through all his aesthetic or moral nature until he sets to work, then he is willy-nilly caught in the act of writing into the unexplored depths of himself, into those regions which are as mysterious to him as other people. So he can comprehend, no, rather he can deal with himself as a literary object, as the name of that man who goes through his pages, only by creating himself as a *literary* character, fully so much as any literary character in a work of undisputed fiction. That is the only way a man in mid-career can begin to approach the mysterious forces which push him to write about these matters in the first place. He is off on a search. Like Theseus he will encounter his experience on the point of his walking stick; here, his pencil. To the extent that he succeeds in making a viable character who will attract literary experience metaphorically equal to the ambiguous experience in his life which impelled him to write in the first place, so he will set out on that reconnaissance into the potentialities of an overpowering work.

But it is no easy job! To the complications and hazards of creating an interesting imaginary character are now added all the real dangers of mentioning real names and real events, with all the uncharted —

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since works of this sort are rare — all the uncharted and spooky perils of uprooting a hundred established complacencies in a hundred real places. The perils may be no worse in reality than offending a few thousand readers by a novel, but one doesn't know, there is a point of no return implicit in such an endeavor. Moreover, one is presenting a personality which will be better or worse than one's own, and people will react to it with the same love or hate they reserve for characters in a novel. One is advancing and endangering one's career by writing the book, the book is now a protagonist in the progress of one's success. Self-interest naturally slants a word here, literary honesty bends it back there. One does not know whether to tell the little lie or shrive oneself. An overload of choices descends on the brain of any ambitious man engaged in giving a contentious portrait of himself. Yet that is not even the worst of the difficulty. The real woe is that one is forced to examine oneself existentially, perceive oneself in the act of perceiving, (but worse, far worse — through the act of perceiving, perceive a Self who may manage to represent the separate warring selves by a Style). It is necessary to voyage through the fluorescent underground of the mind, that arena of self-consciousness where Sartre grappled with the *pour-soi* and the *en-soi*; intellections consuming flesh, consciousness the negation, yes, the very consumption of being. One is digesting one's own gut in such an endeavor.

3.

This ulcerous claim check now stamped, let us take up an existential hypothesis: *the* Norman Podhoretz in the book called *Making It* is, we will assume, a fictional character, an editor of a well-established magazine, well regarded, etc., etc. He is not yet forty, not by several years, but is tormented out of the sum of all vectors of ambition, caution, desire, fear, honesty, horror, honor, courage, and personal dissatisfaction to write a book about himself, Why? He thinks (that is, the character thinks) it is because he has a major thesis, something new to say about success and the ambiguities of its state, the relation of others to his success. He has even a thesis in his mind as he begins his book. We can quote from it:

> For taking my career as seriously as I do in this book, I will no doubt be accused of self-inflation and therefore of tastelessness. So be it. There was a time when to talk candidly about sex was similarly regarded as tasteless — a betrayal of what D. H. Lawrence once called "the dirty little secret." For many of us, of course, this is no longer the case. But judging by the embarrass-

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> ment that a frank discussion of one's feelings about one's own success, or lack of it, invariably causes in polite company today, ambition (itself a species of lustful hunger) seems to be replacing erotic lust as the prime dirty little secret of the well-educated American soul. And since the natural accompaniments of a dirty little secret are superstition, hypocrisy, and cant, it is no cause for wonder that the theme of success rarely appears in our discourse unattended by at least one of these three dismal Furies inherited from Victorian sex.

The thesis stated in the first pages, *Making It* then goes on to describe the adventures of the protagonist. If they are in the main intellectual, they are nonetheless novelistically interesting, because they partake of the most basic American tale of them all — the young man from the provinces who moves to the city and succeeds. If the trip is here only from Brooklyn to Manhattan, the character, quite aware of his universality, remarks, "One of the longest journeys in the world is . . . from certain neighborhoods in Brooklyn to certain parts of Manhattan. I have made that journey. . . ." Since the real, as opposed to the fictional Norman Podhoretz, is a man with a firm sense of neighborhood, he is doubtless quite aware that he has in life moved from Brownsville to West End Avenue — which is not quite up to the claims of his fictional journey; a look at his neighbors would remind him that the literal physical move is not an empire superior to jumping from Brownsville to Eastern Parkway. But this is the trouble with the book from its root. As a fictional character, Podhoretz would already be absurd — a pompous man, full of snobbery, but so blind to any true version of snobbery that he would palm off his address as superior. In life, as the real Norman Pod, he is of course speaking metaphorically. Those "certain parts of Manhattan" are not where he lives, but rather are enclaves of society where he, unlike his West End Avenue neighbors, has entrée. But he has already, unwittingly, like a novice novelist driven a separation between the real life of the detail and its inadequate fictional manifest. His book is thus from the beginning of its first chapter two books, one for readers who know him, another for readers who don't. And the reason is simple. The art of the novel begins with a primary demand: the novel must be in its fashion literal. Since it is not life, its life depends on the scrupulous accumulation of its details. To make a fine phrase, Podhoretz took a shortcut with the novelistic facts. That need not be fatal in criticism, but such shortcuts, particularly at the onset, distort the magnetic field of the novel. Already, to readers who do not know him, he is living in a fancier neighborhood than in

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fact he inhabits; to readers who do, there is a gap between the literal Norman Podhoretz and the less conscientious fictional presence in *Making It*. That is perhaps the last and most difficult demand of this special category of fiction — that one must succeed in creating a character who is not fatally separate to those who know the author and those who don't.

Nonetheless, after this opening flaw, the character Norman Podhoretz in this special-category-of-fiction continues well. We move through early chapters which have the quiet authority of good art, engaging near-tender accounts of his relation with a snobbish teacher exacerbated into "depths of loving despair" by the contrast between his intellectual promise and his red satin Cherokees Social Athletic Club jacket. We continue, through glimpses of his family, the implicit psychic mechanics — *tastefully* delineated — of his separation from family and neighborhood, his immersion, or partial immersion, in the subtle intoxications of life at Columbia (which is to say, the life of the spirit with most intuitions plucked from the grinds of the subway wheel) and good analysis follows of the play between open and concealed scholastic ambition.

> I can see now, of course, that I must have caused the "snobs" as much pain as they caused me. If I envied them their social composure and their apparent self-assurance, they must have envied me my freedom from the scruples which governed them and the consequent torrent of unhindered energy on which I was able to call. These scruples had nothing to do with morality; they had to do only with the code of manners governing ambitiousness which seemed to bind everyone at Columbia but me. It was a code which forbade one to work too hard or to make any effort to impress a professor or to display the slightest concern over grades. Since most of the "snobs" in question were serious students, however, the code hemmed them in, and since most of them were also ridden with ambition — quite as much, I think, as I — it forced them into secret transgressions, made them feel guilty, hypocritical, and ashamed. Yet I, a flagrantly open violator, instead of being punished, was being rewarded; I would probably even wind up, a "snob" once bitterly remarked to one of my friends, with Columbia's choicest prize, a Kellett Fellowship: "Can you imagine *him* at Oxford or Cambridge? Sammy Glick in the *Agora*!"

Which is, in fact, exactly where he succeeds in making it, to Clare College at Cambridge. Descriptions follow — spare, comprehensive, artfully discerning of the differences in education, ambitions, class, and country. Much good analysis, modest but pertinent, so convincing in the modesty that even such large remarks as the following

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> I became a Leavisian — not, perhaps, the most ardent of his young epigoni at Cambridge, but, in all truth, the others being a singularly dreary and humorless lot, the most adept . . .

are acceptable precisely because one has come to trust this detachment through the quiet severity of observation which accompanies less agreeable insights.

The novel continues well. It is an odd novel up to here, dry, almost ascetic in its details, so sparse indeed in its sensuous descriptions and so leisurely in its analyses of the protagonist's changing intellectual and social stances that one admires the courage of the novelist — he dares to push his novel in the direction of the informed sociological essay where in order to nail analysis one may even smuggle in a piece or two of carefully protected personal material. The difference, and it keens our interest, is that the tone here while close to abstract in its impersonality is never self-protective. On the contrary, it reveals, then reveals more, never guards the subject.

This tone continues for more than half the book. Podhoretz returns to America, has his first entrée into circles which are written about as if they were the equivalent to him of Versailles for Saint-Simon. There is here a gulf he does not sight completely to the bottom: there is probably a hint too little irony now in his portrait of the young literary man, extraordinarily self-made, who is feeling such vast admiration for purlieus like *Commentary* and *Partisan Review*. There was indeed a time when *Partisan Review* was the kind of duchess who could cut off more than one literary head with a stroke — it inspired fear in young authors which must have been equal to the terror of French courtiers when they first beheld the palace, but there are still differences to recognize — Philip Rahv with a mouthful of hot pastrami was not quite the novelistic equal of Louis XIV showing his knee (and if William Phillips looked like Richelieu, Richelieu was indubitably wearing his tweed jacket).

It is at about this point that the novel begins, most subtly, to falter. It has been economical, provocative, near to austere, and all readable as a narrative up to this point. If we still know little about the hero, what we do know has that tone of authority which suggests hope of a small classic in the making — we accept the hero, believe him, want to know more of him, and of his adventures. In fact, the novel continues thus good for a while — fine chapters in much the same tone carry Podhoretz through five months in New York while waiting to go into the Army, then a stretch of two years in uniform. We have at this point traversed more than half the book, and there has been but one false

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note — a faint hint of the stricken in describing that literary establishment of New York which Podhoretz calls The Family. There is despite all criticisms well-taken, all ongoing analyses of The Family's desires and prejudices, obsessiveness, cannibalism (of reputations, not flesh — so far as we know) there is still a hint of the one weakness which is fatal to the young novelist: flattery. The mouthful of pastrami sandwich in Rahv's mouth persists in being too small. So do all the other mouthfuls. Wherever there is a personal or professional reference to Dwight Macdonald, Mary McCarthy, F. W. Dupee, John Thompson, Lionel Trilling, Diana Trilling, Paul Goodman, Robert Warshow, Elliot Cohen, Hannah Arendt, Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, Irving Kristol, Steven Marcus, Rahv, Phillips, Jason Epstein, Plimpton, Mailer, Bob Silvers, Lillian Hellman, Sherry Abel, W. H. Auden, Leslie Fiedler, Alfred Kazin, Dan Moynihan, Richard Goodwin, Harold Rosenberg, Isaac Rosenfeld, Arthur Schlesinger, Delmore Schwartz, Susan Sontag, Murray Kempton, Mike Harrington, and a number of others — the index to the book suggests we are reading Main Currents of New York Thought — you may be certain the reference is invariably as attractive as the sort of remark one makes when giving a reference to a Foundation for a friend. The kindness palls. It is the one mark of timorousness in the book. Only Saul Bellow and Baldwin are shown in any kind of unattractive light and then with care and preparation of context in order to strike no undue foul blow.

It is deadening. It saps the book, downs it not because we have been expecting an exposé of everything low, dirty, and vulpine in the New York literary establishment, nothing in the tone of the book has offered such an expectation, no, the disappointment is organic to the needs of the undeclared novel. We are being offered a restrained muted limited account of a young provincial, a modest example when all is said of a Julian Sorel who is making his way up in the world. Not, of course, through a judicious mixture of sexual and social audacity, but by an uncomfortable sometimes self-torturing accommodation between the power of his ambition versus his irrepressible demands for an integrity to his expression. What more fascinating event, after half a book's worth of the best preparation, to see our latter-day Sorel make it and lose it and make it again with the Family, that peculiar colony, aviary and zoo of the most ferocious, idealistic, egotistic, narcissistic, cultivated, constipated, brilliant, sensitive, brutally insensitive, half-productive and near-sterile gang of the best and worst literary court ever to rise right out of the immigrant ranks of a nation. The comic and tragic aspects of such a gang take one's novelistic breath away — the satiric possibilities put it back.

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Well, of course one may say this is merely Mailer's view of The Family, not Podhoretz' — the author of *Making It* is entitled to his own view. No argument. It is just that his view cannot be developed in any direction. What is one to make of an Establishment which is so kind and splendid in its personnel? The sum of the individual portraits Podhoretz offers of this Quality Lucifer Lit Biz Clan is thus full of sugar that one cannot begin to comprehend his abstract portrait which in contrast presents the Family (in general terms so vague one cannot perceive a single relation in the fog) as no better than any other Establishment. Truth, if The Family adds up to the kind sum of the specific charitable parts Podhoretz gives them, then the demand on him is to write a novel of insuperable difficulty (or even a sociological analysis of the same difficulty) which is to say — an Establishment composed only of the kindest folk: into their ranks enters an ambitious Provincial — what a novel!

No, one does not recognize Plimpton, and Silvers, and Rahv, and Epstein, and Phillips, no, nor Mailer, and Trilling, and Sontag, and Kristol. It is not that they are despicable all, nor mean, nor even full of rapine — it is that they are complex, as unendurably complex as our century is complex, and so *Making It* ceases to be a novel just so soon as its protagonist enters the climax of his narrative; we are projected right out of that rare aesthetic vineyard where autobiography dares to become that special and most daring category of fiction which is its inner necessity, and instead we are now forced to jog along on the washboard road of a memoir. Characters come in and out, observations are made, names file through, Podhoretz suffers, becomes an editor, thrives, we do not care — the novel has disappeared — the interplay between ambitious perception and society which has been the source of its value now gives ground to the aesthetic perplexity of the author who must flounder in the now novelistically alienated remains of his hypothesis — that success is the dirty little secret. Now he has no novel on which to work it, only sketchy anecdotes, abortive essays, isolated insights, and note of the drone — repetitions. A fine even potentially marvelous book gets lost in a muddle, finally finishes itself and is done. No joy in closing the back cover.

One must wonder. How does a man who has the simple guts to begin such a work in the first place lack the nerve to hump it through to the end? And the answer if one is to ignore such natural motives as impatience, overwork, or general anxiety, is that the instinctive fear of a sophisticated writer at attempting to explore an Establishment is even greater than the well-established fear of the ridicule he will know at presenting himself as a character. A writer as forceful and well-geared

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for exposition as Podhoretz reveals personal anxiety in his work not through deterioration of style so much as through deterioration of intellectual connection. By the time the book is done, the hypothesis of the "dirty little secret" and the dwindled novel have disengaged from one another, separated, we assume, by dread of invading the theme, dread of exploring the intimate play of hero and Establishment. It is no mean matter to put oneself in a real novel, but it is a nightmare to take on a true Establishment, such a nightmare that we need not wonder why Podhoretz deserted his possibilities as thoroughly as if Stendhal had presented the family of Mademoiselle de la Mole as charming.

All right, then. Let us make a quick pass at the little mystery of why Establishments provoke such vitiating fear in writers as seasoned and dedicated as Podhoretz.

4.

The clue is to be found in the reception of *Making It* when the work was still in manuscript. The author's dread was not ill-founded. Despite a $25,000 contract, the first publisher, Roger Straus, rejected the book. Publishers do not reject books in such cases because they dislike them, but because they find the long-term consequences disagreeable; the verdict of just about everyone in the Establishment who then read the manuscript was negative. Which is to say scandalized, shocked, livid, revolted, appalled, disheartened, and enraged — an excessive reaction for a book which is finally at worst a not altogether compelling memoir. What could cause so intense a reaction, so intense an overreaction?

Establishments are like banks — they release value only if it will return with interest. Podhoretz was obviously giving something away. But what was it? This is the question which remains unanswered, and has in fact attached itself to the book so closely that the reviews which followed publication were more a function of the Establishment's initial antipathy than a pristine reaction to the book itself — indeed many reviewers expecting a work where names would be named and reputations outraged were therefore splenetic with disappointment; others, feeling the book had been killed before it saw print were solicitous of its merits.

One could of course give the author credit for having unearthed a thesis (that success had replaced sex as the dirty little secret), a thesis sufficiently integral and explosive to dynamite buried Establishment furies, but the thesis while meandering in and out of the book was not organically attached to the work; rather it appeared now and again like an added starter. One could dislike the thesis and still not mind the

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book. Besides the thesis itself, if novel, did not seem quite accurate. It was the sort of illumination which could apply for particular Establishmentarians, but was utterly inapplicable for others: indeed, the Family as a whole gave off the aura of all Establishments — they were obviously as interested in success as any other bank. While they did not talk a great deal about it, and were reasonably dialectical about money — resenting Mary McCarthy's modest haul, while not at all unimpressed with the size of Capote's — it would have been not impossible to defend the opposite thesis that the need for success in one's metier was so taken for granted in these salons that there was no necessity any longer to talk about it.

It is better to chase our little mystery by remembering that Establishmentarians please their peers when they write works of symbolic intensity like Trilling's *The Middle of the Journey* or memoirs of unsurpassed sweetness like Kazin's *A Walker in the City*. They charm when they write trivia about New York with agreeable tone — as in Jason Epstein's fillip for *The New York Review*, they impress when their theses are rich in reference, comprehensive, original and assertive, as are Harold Rosenberg's on New York art. Indeed Establishment writers displease the Family only when they fail to present themselves as critical, intelligent, superior, and *in their cool*. The only piece remotely comparable in its innocent assault on the total temper of the Family was Diana Trilling's account of going to hear Allen Ginsberg read his poetry at Columbia. That is writing with such simplicity of affect and directness of response that it may live longer in literature than anything else by the lady — it has the tone of enduring literature — yet it was loathed in its time, loathed one may suspect for the defenselessness of its approach since Diana presented herself not as a distinguished critic (which had hitherto been implicit in her style) but as a bewildered faculty wife: the Establishment reacted as if they were being thereby sucked down into a mucker's muck.

So we may as well assume that the lightnings Podhoretz aroused came not because he was revealing the dirty little secret of others, but because he was exposing himself, and this act of self-exposure was received by The Family as a treason — one simply did not go around explaining any member of the clan. To do that was to weaken all.

It is easier to comprehend if we think of the Rockefellers or the Fords, or any other gathering of wealth. Exposure by any member of such families is odious to the rest because their power — to themselves at least, as a reflection perhaps of their guilt — rests on a fragile base. Let us assume the same for our own Establishment. They came into being almost by accident for they began as left-wing militants interested

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in literary criticism, and attracted more or less nonradical literary scholars and critics of special stature like Trilling and Kazin and Dupee only when their politics — isolated from both the Left Wing and support of the American war effort in the forties — became so encysted, that it was politics literally of the cyst, it nourished nothing without, it was a politics without price, danger, or engagement — except for such extremes of pacifism and anarchism as provided by Lowell and Macdonald. Later, in the late forties and early fifties, the Establishment was to run — we may hope unwittingly — as sweepers for the CIA. From some unclassifiable brand of Trotskyism, the Family had pushed on to more or less total anti-Communism as a political position. It was a position of much empty power and much empty polemic, a literary equivalent of Congressional junkets, and left the Establishment on sterile ground after twenty-five years of existence — no major critic and no major novelist had developed from their influence. Of course, Trilling was quite possibly a major critic if one did not pose him too comparatively against Wilson, but he would have been that kind of major critic without the Family, he was a literary man first. Others — Macdonald, Kazin and Howe most notably — were first-rate but they did not grow over the years, no schools of criticism developed from them, no seminal ideas, no ferments — just an endless series of brilliant but tactical papers. They were guardians rather than catalysts. Any number of members of the Family were enormously impressive in fragments, and Harold Rosenberg and Meyer Schapiro and Clement Greenberg all in quite separate ways had large even commanding effect on the New York art world, Paul Goodman was later to have as much to do with the formation of the New Left as any writer about, but in the fifties he was alienated from the Family — their only poet, Robert Lowell, was a poet without them and before them; their house novelist, Mary McCarthy, had fled to Newport in search of real stimulation, and their big novelist, Saul Bellow, who was later to justify his reputation, had been advanced to glory in the mid-fifties on the basis of *Augie March* which was absurd in its parts, unconvincing along its whole, overcooked, overstuffed, unfelt, heaps of literary bull-bull. If the Establishment had been wiped out in the late fifties by a bomb, the verdict of history might have found them destructive of more talent than they liberated.

It was in the sixties that much began to happen. Kennedy's desire to weld the separate establishments of America's cultural, social, and political life together, gave the Family opportunity to inherit new power — the vertices of their plots were found now in parties at Plimpton's and forums with Schlesinger — after the birth of *The New York Review* the Establishment had real power which ran to many a connec-

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tion in many a corner of America. If the war in Vietnam had forced the Establishment to sever its connection with the Administration, there was still Bobby Kennedy to serve as Pope of Avignon and an extraordinary mixture of positions everywhere from just left of the ADA to just right of Black Power there to be taken on every issue of the minute. This Establishment once ogre-ish, fearful, arid, poisonous, proud, insular, scholarly, slavish, tyrannical and cold, was now hip, slick, mercurial, Camp, evasive, treacherous, Pop, militant, and chic — yet wonder of wonders it was the same Establishment, same not because the people were similar (so many had gone, so many were new) but because its essential presentation of itself to the world was the same. The Establishment had begun as a put-on, and it was continuing as a put-on.

Let us quote three times quickly from Jacob Brackman's article on "The Put-On" in *The New Yorker*, June 24, 1967.

> Irony is unsuccessful when misunderstood. But the put-on, *inherently*, cannot be understood.
>
> Not holding any real position (the put-on) is itself invulnerable to attack.
>
> He (the put-on artist) doesn't deal in isolated little tricks; rather, he has developed a pervasive style of relating to others that perpetually casts what he says into doubt. The put-on is an *open-end* form. That is to say it is rarely climaxed by having the "truth" set straight — when a truth, indeed, exists. "Straight" discussion, when one of the participants is putting the others on, is soon subverted and eventually sabotaged by uncertainty. His intentions, and his opinions remain cloudy.

Who can fail to recognize what a superb description this is of the Early Establishment and the Late. The love of ambiguity in the early Establishment, the endless theses so intricately structured in the syntax of their own jargon that parodies of the old *Partisan Review* style used to deliver insights, willy-nilly, as good as the original; indeed how better than by the logic of the put-on to explain the extraordinary scholarly apparatus of the old articles which produced theses so arcane and intimately rubbed with sorcerer's garlic that no one can remember a single one of the theses today. But they were not to be remembered — the articles, the magazine, the Establishment itself existed as a way of life which would generate a kind of power and position for itself without necessity for a product which might be consumed and criticized. The old *Partisan Review* used to sit on coffee tables like a magic object, not to be examined, certainly not to be enjoyed, but to be received, an emanation.

The new Establishment, neater, niftier, swift, puts working draw-

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ings of Molotov cocktails on the cover of *The New York Review of Books* — the put-on is merely more timely. Is it revolution they are advocating with the drawing, no, it is news. Is that really news? No, but it is an attitude. What's an attitude? That's for you to define, but why are you upset by the drawing? So the new Establishment is ultra-Left, yet not very left. They will talk of going to Hanoi to sit in cafes to be bombed, but they do not sign income tax protests against the war nor are they ready to put their names to a number of causes which could land them in jail. They are indifferent to power, they are resourceful at gathering it. In fact, they have no attitude to power goes the put-on, why do you? Where the old Establishment was often supercilious about literary values, beating every writer to death with the standard of Henry James until the moment came when the critic would say, "I can't bear Henry James, can you?" so the new Establishment is supercilious about power, success, and money. Success is not its dirty little secret, but its ball of mercury. Do not trap the mercury it would say — my powers of locomotion depend on its ability to keep me moving — I am a dead man once I stop!

That is the anxiety of all Establishments. Stripped of all British wickedness, their talents they believe are revealed as second-rate, they are but flowers pressed in a book. So they will play the shell game, do the dance of the veils, adore the put-on, elevate Camp, praise Pop, rush to install plastic in fashions, and avoid like demons and witches confrontation upon a point.

Can that be why *Making It* was so abominable to them? Because Podhoretz was blind to the defenses of the put-on and had the idiocy or the suicidal strength to move to the center of the stage, open his box, exhibit his tricks? If mercury is your god, then self-exposure is like sand, like sand up your ass, like bogging the armies of your friends in swamps of sand — it was with all the fury of a military betrayal that the Establishment turned on Podhoretz.

Yes. For indeed this Establishment began some thirty or thirty-five years ago when a few timid intellectuals fierce in the power of their minds took a set of uncompromising attitudes on literary standards, and discovered to their surprise that more than a few in America — that bowl of the great undefined soup — listened to them as authorities, followed them as though they might be high priests with an ear to the murmur in the void.

It had begun as a put-on. No one knew as much as they claimed to know, no one could have passed through the galaxies of experience they were ready to judge, authority was a mask they assumed as the bravest assertion of their life (the ills and the terrors of the ghetto

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still clinging to some of their toes) and the triumph of the assertion was in the continuing life of their put-on, their life became a put-on where a stand would never be taken, for by a stand might they be judged and the mask stripped; no, they galloped and growled and huffed and puffed (nimble all the while) and stayed alive as comedians of the highest order, and were followed as their Establishment developed into another, by further newer younger practitioners of the put-on, young literary executives who would not be caught dead making a remark with their back to the wall or the ball of their foot off the ball of mercury, there was even a vaster anxiety to keep the put-on alive in this younger Establishment, for it was less well-educated than the old, less seasoned, less tempered, the young were inheritors of power they had not gained by withstanding a siege. So they were somewhat appalled by their power and utterly aghast at the forces which confronted them across the gulf of America.

5.

Of course, we are a severed land. We have grown too fast and never consumed our wastes. They bloat our gut, stupefy our mind, and wash the art of communication from Right Wing to Left with the St. Vitus Dance of the put-on. If the Left Establishment, now conscience of America, sits in terror before the muscle and body of that Right Wing which gained America with its fists (and its money), rest assured the Right Wing sits in its own terror before judgment, listening like Lennie to any George's speech about the rabbits, floundering in its own vast rotting cabbage of sentimental mortgages, poisoned fertilizer, ideological dustbowls, and put-ons so monumental you cannot shovel them away. The Kingfish of the put-on speaks:

> "Sad but steady — always convinced of his cause — he stuck it out," Mr. Johnson said of President Abraham Lincoln. "Sad but steady, so will we," he added.
>
> — *The New York Times,* Feb. 13, 1968

It's the tragedy of us all that the consequent moment of affirmation, outright confession, or sheer renunciation now appears out of a mirror whose first question becomes: Is this noble act the work of a whack or the superbest put-on of all.

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William H. Pritchard

# ON WYNDHAM LEWIS

> "Are you not ashamed to be reading a book by such an insignificant author — whose works are thought so poorly of . . . that no one has ever thought it worth while to ask his permission to use them in an anthology, or include them in an edition of 'contemporary classics' — or whatever they called their series of well-thought of contemporary authors?"

Wyndham Lewis put the question in 1950 as he took a retrospective look at his career. Seventeen years later, with most of his books out of print and unread, the question's sardonic edge is still appropriate. Lewis rationalized his failure to become a well-thought-of contemporary author by insisting that he had been "suppressed" because of the unfashionably rightist character of his politics in the thirties. It is easy to dispose of such lamentation simply by claiming that Lewis suffered from a persecution complex, or that his situation was no worse than anybody else's in a cruel world; but it is also undeniable that he had become in the minds of many so wholly identified with and reduced to a perverse, wrongheaded and sentimentally hard-boiled politics that he figured as little more than an illustrative example of how not to think, or as a writer who richly deserved the neglect into which he fell. Auden could refer to him, affectionately, as "that lonely old Volcano of the Right"; a more usual response was Irving Howe's asperity in his "Age of Conformity" essay: ". . . when a charlatan like Wyndham Lewis is revived and praised for his wisdom, it is done, predictably, by a Hugh Kenner in the *Hudson Review*." Howe was merely invoking Lewis to make a point about liberalism and the literary scene; what's interesting is

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the no-nonsense assurance with which he is placed as a charlatan. Howe's essay, published in 1954, is strong evidence that Lewis was unsuccessful in his attempts (over the previous sixteen or so years) to recant. He might and did proclaim himself a supporter of the *genre humain,* an admirer of Harry S. Truman, a loyal harrassed participant in post-war England's Socialist experiment; none of these did much to remove memories of his earlier infatuation with Hitler.

But, rightly convinced as Lewis was that Politics had played a fatally important role in his "suppression," it is worth entertaining the notion that — the Hitler book or no — his activities as a bothersome satirist and critic of other men's work precipitated the decline of his reputation. A quotation from *Paleface* suggests that the kind of polemical-philosophical mission Lewis embarked on in the late twenties was not designed to Win Him Friends and Influence People:

> In the arts of formal expression, a "dark night of the soul" is settling down. A kind of mental language is in process of invention, flouting and overriding the larynx and the tongue. Yet an art that is "subjective" and can look to no common factor of knowledge or feeling, and lean on no tradition, is exposed to the necessity, first of all, of instructing itself far more profoundly as to the origins of its impulses and the nature and history of the formulas with which it works; or else it is committed to becoming a jealous parrot of systems and judgments that reach it from the unknown.

As he worked to complete *The Apes of God,* his own monstrous parody of twentieth-century mental language, Lewis became increasingly committed to the instructing of his literary contemporaries. The instruction went on mainly in the three issues of his one-man polemical magazine, *The Enemy* (1927-29), and made up a significant part of *Time and Western Man* (1927), *Paleface* (1929) and *The Diabolical Principle* (1931). Then after *Apes* was published, and Lewis' reputation began to slide (the Hitler book appeared in 1931), he wrote a number of disenchanted articles and collected them in the gloomy and brilliant *Men Without Art* (1934). This body of polemical writing can be praised and attacked on many grounds, but when sifted and combined it yields a literary criticism consistent and intelligent enough to be admired as it is not at the moment.

As a literary critic there are a good many things Lewis was not: he never approached a book or a writer with the sole intention of understanding and communicating that understanding to someone

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else. He wrote no measured essays in literary appreciation for its own sake, and he had no interest in evaluating or ranking writers and their books unless it was (as in his famous Taxi-Cab Driver Test for "Fiction") to make a rough distinction between Art (Henry James) and Banality (Huxley is his example). Nor was his criticism addressed to writers of the past. With the exception of *The Lion and the Fox,* a book in part about Shakespeare, though not really "on" Shakespeare, and a chapter on Henry James in *Men Without Art,* he deals exclusively with contemporaries, and even James is evoked mainly for the light he throws on the novel in 1930. Indeed Lewis' criticism is devoted almost entirely to the novel or other prose. He felt, one gathers, that poetry was an admirable enough affair, if a good deal less in touch with modern life than was prose; the result is that the only modern poem he ever criticizes, and that only to point out Poundian mannerisms, is *The Cantos.* Lewis was eager to close-read a page from an Eliot essay, but had no interest in subjecting Eliot's poetry to comparable scrutiny. It may well have been that he was conservative (and self-protective) enough to feel that the critic of a medium should be an interested practitioner in the medium he criticizes, and he was hardly a poet, *One-Way Song* notwithstanding.

If at first glance there seems to be a lack of disinterestedness in this criticism, the lack doesn't seem so great when we look for such disinterestedness in the work of his best critical contemporaries. Admittedly there is an idea, a principle to advance or condemn, lying behind (usually not very far behind) every paragraph Lewis wrote about Pound, Joyce or Eliot. But in anyone's list of the most valuable critics of modern literature — a short one would include Eliot and Leavis, perhaps Pound and D. H. Lawrence — where is the pure intelligence operating with Arnoldian objectivity to see the object as in itself it really is? Instead, we find powerful convictions about what constitutes a healthy art and civilization, and a resultant concern with whether a specific book or writer promotes that art and that civilization. Lewis, if added to this group, takes his place in the unlikely company of Pound and Lawrence, rather than Eliot and Leavis. The critical achievement of the latter two is immense and indisputable; compared to them, Pound and Lawrence sound like wild men, inclined on occasion to rant and to mix in foolish pronouncements with their brilliantly unsystematic perceptions about literature. It is prob-

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ably with Lawrence's essays and reviews that Lewis' critical work can best be compared. Both men practice criticism by fits and starts since something else important is forever intruding into their not-so-well-turned essays. Both are exceedingly — for some, excessively — personal critics who excel in reading between the lines to bring out the assumptions which underlie them. Once there, the assumptions often being anathema, they are subjected to an aggressive irony that moves toward exposure of the falsity or vulgarity of the book. And so perhaps it is fitting that each typed the other as a slave, respectively, of the intellect and the blood, and bracketed the other with an inferior, more slavish partisan of those causes.[1]

Lewis is always linked with Pound and Eliot as, in polite terms, men of the Right; his differences from them are just as interesting, and more significant insofar as they bear on literature. On the other hand, it has not been noted that his critical work has profound affinities with the literary-sociological "liberal" interests of Leavis and the *Scrutiny* group in its early years. Although Leavis immortalizes him in the Richmond lecture as "the brutal and boring Wyndham Lewis," they were stalking many of the same enemies and tendencies in the years around 1930. With regard to the Sitwells, or Arnold Bennett's book-reviewing or the Joyce-cult, they spoke as one voice while officially either ignoring or dismissing each other.[2] Finally, although the usefulness of his criticism does not have to be defended on historical grounds, Lewis' ability to speak out fully and suggestively on *Ulysses* in 1927, or on Pound's work in progress in the same year,

1 In *Phoenix* (1936) Lawrence couples Lewis with Aldous Huxley as smart young men. Lewis attacks Lawrence along with Sherwood Anderson in *Paleface* (1929).

2 Lewis' sarcastic treatment of Lawrence would not make for much communication between Leavis and Lewis, especially since T. S. Eliot used Lewis' account by way of criticizing Lawrence. In "Mr. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis and Lawrence" (1936) Leavis allows Lewis "undeniable talent" but finds him absolutely unfit to criticize Lawrence. After an intelligent review by Douglas Garman of some minor Lewis books in the early thirties, his literary work went unreviewed and unnoticed by *Scrutiny* — evidently the "undeniable talent" didn't demand much confrontation. From material in the Lewis archive at Cornell University it seems that he became angry at Mrs. Leavis for not mentioning him in *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932) as a useful analyst of contemporary literary culture. He speaks of the Leavises either as a late offshoot of the Bloomsbury tree (!) or, in the preface to *Men Without Art* (1934), as an "appendix" to I. A. Richards. After these wild swings he remained silent.

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or on Faulkner and Hemingway soon afterwards, shows he had an eye for the books that mattered. For that very reason, and particularly in the cases of Pound, Eliot and Joyce, these books needed to be subjected to a harder, more searching examination than they were likely to get from book-reviewers. The following manifesto from the introduction to *Men Without Art* contains nothing to which we don't immediately assent today, at least at the level of lip-service. Written in the early thirties, it reminds us that only through the efforts of practicing literary critic-sociologists like Lewis, the *Scrutiny* group, Orwell, Edmund Wilson, has it become the main assumption behind our own criticism and teaching. The passage's debt to Richards' *Principles* and to Eliot's work in general, hardly needs remarking upon:

> All forms of art of a permanent order are intended not only to please and to excite . . . but to call into play the entire human capacity — for sensation, reflection, imagination, and will. We judge a work of art, ultimately, with reference to its capacity to effect this total mobilization of our faculties. . . . Implicit in the serious work of art will be found politics, theology, philosophy — in brief all the great intellectual departments of the human consciousness; even the Plain Reader is aware of that in theory. But what is not so clear to very many people is that the most harmless piece of literary entertainment . . . is at all events politically and morally influential.

But Lewis' main interest was not in exploring what he goes on to call "the whole barbarous system of conduct and judgment to match, [that] is *implied* in every flick of the kinetic novelettes," and he turned instead to the more difficult task of bringing out those subtler implications found in the serious work of his contemporaries.

## The Men of 1914

These qualities of Lewis' literary criticism can be noted when it is at its most genial and flexible — when it deals with the other members of what he called the "Men of 1914": Pound, Joyce and Eliot. His remarks about this combination show as much warmth, loyalty, even pride, as he ever gave to any group.[3] An unabashed

3 See his retrospectively mellow essay on Pound (who was in St. Elizabeth's at the time) in *An Examination of Ezra Pound* (New Directions, 1950) and the fascinating account of Eliot in *T. S. Eliot: Symposium* (Chicago, 1949). These essays, plus the anecdotes about Pound, Eliot and Joyce in *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937), temper but don't negate the earlier and harsher criticism considered here.

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pleasure in the highbrow art of all four writers goes along with an explanation of why in 1937, when he published his reminiscences of the "men" in *Blasting and Bombardiering*, that art had been left high and dry. In this memoir Lewis claimed boldly that by contrast to Shaw, Wells, even Oscar Wilde, all of whom were public identities to which the pursuit of art took second place, Joyce, Eliot, Pound and himself represented a rejection of romantic in favor of classical art, and a movement away from political propaganda into the detachment of true literature. A glance at the literary landscape of 1937 convinced him that their group attempt had failed, but only because the world with its wars, revolutions and economic depressions had sold out. The Men of 1914 should be thought of then as "*the first men of a Future that has not materialized.*" So much the worse for the world, runs the argument.

Such defiant nostalgia is attractively suited to the colloquial ease of a memoir, but there is no need to let it obscure the truth that the men of 1914 marched under no such banner, with no such unity of purpose as Lewis later claimed. The ironic fact is that Lewis had spent a good deal of energy in bringing out, through analysis of the other Men, their romantic predilections, and therefore vices; it was the pretense of classical affiliation, whether at the level of technique or temperament, that he set out to expose in Pound, Joyce and Eliot. His success in doing so had somewhat the effect of leaving himself high and dry, and at least on one occasion he recognized what had happened. The interest of his criticism lies, however, in the way he conducts the exposures.

### Pound

The simplest and most amiable of these "exposures" is found in Lewis' criticism of Ezra Pound, located in two chapters from *Time and Western Man*, one of them titled "A Man in Love with the Past." Tributes to Pound's kind nature as an individual are interspersed with a more critical assessment of his virtues and limitations as a poet. In the latter role Lewis finds him to be a person "without a trace of originality of any sort," a "great intellectual parasite" (though not, he adds, an unpleasant one) who lives off truly original artists. Because of his allegiances to so many figures and places in times gone by, he is also "an extremely untrustworthy guide to the present." What Lewis elsewhere calls Pound's "tendency to regard a

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scuffle in fourteenth-century Siena as fundamentally more interesting than a similar scuffle in Wigan or Detroit today" marks his orthodoxy in the romantic cult of faraway places with strange-sounding names. Yet there are also strong positive gifts that go hand in hand with these romantic limitations: Lewis notes Pound's uncanny ability to "get inside the skin of somebody else, of power and renown, a Propertius or an Arnaut Daniel" and praises his superb capacities as a translator and imitator of other men's styles. In line with this comes the suggestion that the insincerity or falseness often heard when Pound speaks in his own person is a measure of that poet's inability to apprehend himself or other people as individuals: he is happier when the individual can be converted into a satirical type or an illustrative instance of some public category.

As a practical critic of the *Cantos* (nineteen of which had appeared when *Time and Western Man* was published), Lewis rolls up his sleeves and writes three pages which should be required reading for any young Poundian. He points to Pound's habit of expressing himself in a "mock-bitter sententious *terseness*," seen on one level in the "Amurrican" fondness for words like "bunk" and "slush," on the other by a manneristic "breaking off" in the middle of a line. Anyone who breaks the pentameter today is likely to be regarded as at least on the right poetic track; Lewis, forty years ago, gave another name to certain effects in Pound's procedure with the verse-line, when he spoke of the "histrionic pausing" in parts of the *Cantos,* and labeled it as another aspect of Pound's romantic (if superficially classical) affiliations. The value of speaking in such a rough way about Pound's verse, particularly about what on a later occasion Lewis would refer to as the "admirable" *Cantos,* is that it frees one from being merely classically intimidated by all the rich, strange objects and people whom the poet knows. Lewis suggests, by implication, that the line between a passage from *The Cantos* which succeeds, and one that seems only pretentious name-dropping or chic time-travel, is a thin line that should be carefully inspected.

No such careful inspection is called for by what Lewis terms the "ole Ez" aspect of the poem: "So I sez 'wall haow is it you're over here, right off the Champz Elyzá?' "; Lewis simply calls this Pound at his worst, the poet as heavy-footed, boring, Teutonic clown. With a sort of comradely air of advice he suggests that, since Pound is so interested in music (his fervent championing of George Antheil is

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mentioned) he should get out of poetry, into a medium where you need have nothing to say. That would be preferable, Lewis claims, to using language in the manner of the Champz Elyza *argot* above; that and comparable passages "though they represent Pound the artist at his worst, they show us, I believe, the true Pound, or that part that has not become incorporated in his best highly traditional poetry. And a simpleton is what we are left with." Such a remark made in 1927 might look to be the merest arrogance, and mistaken to boot in view of Pound's dogged perseverance as the *Cantos* roll on. But just how mistaken is it? With the very important exception of the *Pisan Cantos,* where suddenly the poet creates an identity out of which he can speak, sometimes with great power, Lewis' judgment still makes sense. And it is interesting that the scene from contemporary life Pound was finally able to portray so affectingly involved putting the simpleton in a cage and exposing him to the world as a persecuted hero.

### Joyce

Lewis' criticism of Pound is a combination of admiration and condescension; in one paragraph he terms Pound a "kind of intellectual eunuch" but then shows how the limitation can also be a virtue: "He has not effected this intimate entrance into everything that is noble and enchanting for nothing. He has really walked with Sophocles beside the Aegean; he has *seen* the Florence of Cavalcanti. . . ." With Joyce, Lewis employs a somewhat related strategy, mixing respect and annoyance for Joyce's achievement into a highly creative criticism of *Ulysses.* "An Analysis of the Mind of James Joyce" makes up the major part of the "Revolutionary Simpleton" section of *Time and Western Man,* and *Ulysses* appears with Proust's novel as one of the two most important "time-books" in modern literature. Yet the essay contains much observation about Joyce's mind and art that is independent of Lewis' war against the time–philosophy; his perceptions about Joyce are simply more interesting than the idea in the name of which the perceptions are offered.

In brief the analysis runs as follows: Joyce like Pound is a craftsman preoccupied with ways of saying or doing things, rather than an inventive, creative intelligence preoccupied with things to be done or said. He is technically progressive and humanly conserva-

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tive; his passive receptivity to any stylistic wind is of a piece with his lack of preference for one particular point of view over another. His impartiality, then, is a defect in artistic personality, in individual identity. Again like Pound, although the point is not made explicitly, Joyce is an untrustworthy guide to the present because his present is the past — the accumulated Dublin rubbish of his young manhood. He has great sensitivity to verbal clichés, yet his characters are clichés of type rather than individuals; he finds it difficult to set before us a convincing identity that doesn't depend on conventional notions of race or class — the stage-Irishman, the stage-Jew, etc. He looks, once more like Pound, through other people's eyes and not through his own (how Joyce must have responded to the accusation of having second-class sight!). In *Ulysses,* nineteenth-century naturalism combines with the passing parade of objects to form a great *nature morte*; the oppressive thing about it all is that the parade of objects is really one of reflections taking place in somebody's head and reproduced through internal narrative: in other words, Joyce has capitulated to the time-philosophy. Lewis does not minimize the considerable achievement *Ulysses* represents; his metaphors boldly create the kind of achievement he takes it to be:

> It is like a gigantic victorian quilt or antimacassar. Or it is the voluminous curtain that fell, belated (with the alarming momentum of a ton or two of personally organized rubbish), upon the victorian scene. So rich was its delivery, its pent-up outpouring so vehement, that it will remain, eternally cathartic, a monument like a record diarrhoea. No one who looks *at* it will ever want to look *behind* it. It is the sardonic catafalque of the victorian world.

Aside from the impressively overwhelming nature of the description, its penultimate sentence is most important. Here, Lewis is saying, is a book of the surface of things past, internalized into mental deadness, enveloped by thickly-wadded words. In a sense the book really doesn't *mean* anything ("No one who looks *at* it will ever want to look *behind* it") and why should it, since its author has nothing to tell us, is not a mind at all but a demon craftsman, fascinated with doing things as many ways as possible.

Of course from Stuart Gilbert on, most criticism of *Ulysses* has been very much interested in looking behind it, explaining and interpreting symbols, even supposing great wisdom was contained within

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if only the key to it all could be found, meanwhile ignoring what Lewis saw very clearly and emphasized as a given — the comic, encyclopedic nature of the book. Only recently has the critique been recognized for the useful starting-point it provides for discussion of *Ulysses*; that it is a starting-point rather than a terminus is shown by the way critics who begin with it arrive at very different estimates of the book. Hugh Kenner's *Dublin's Joyce* brought Lewis' critique into circulation by calling it, provocatively, a brilliant misreading. Kenner then proceeded to defend the book as more thoroughly sardonic than Lewis realized; if Lewis thought Stephen Dedalus was a prig, ("It would be difficult, I think, to find a more lifeless, irritating, principal figure than the deplorable hero of the *Portrait of the Artist* and of *Ulysses*") Joyce knew it as well or better than anyone and liked him no better than Lewis. If *Ulysses* is a vast glut of matter, a cathartic monument to the Victorian world, a record diarrhea, Joyce meant it to be just that, established Molly Bloom at the head of the flux and looked down in ironic mastery and mockery of it all. Kenner's argument is fascinating and unanswerable if one is willing to imagine a Joyce fully disengaged from his creations. But, as S. L. Goldberg demonstrates in *The Classical Temper,* Kenner's criticism turns Lewis upside down and transforms every apparent vice of *Ulysses* into a hidden virtue. By contrast, Goldberg's own reading of the book refuses to simplify Joyce's irony at its best into an either/or affair, looks behind the sardonic catafalque and finds, not mystic meanings, but a Joyce both sympathetic with and critical of his heroes, Bloom and Stephen. Like Lewis and Kenner, Goldberg sees the book as comic but finds the comedy a more humane one than do they.

This brief mention of one event in recent Joyce criticism takes us away from Lewis' own work, but demonstrates in a particular case how a critique lay around more or less unnoticed for twenty-five years, then became important to someone and now looks like perhaps the most acute writing about Joyce done in the early years of *Ulysses*' publication. That Lewis' account is tendentious, inconsistent with itself, perhaps inspired by motives of jealousy, general malice or whatever one wishes to impute may well be true; but it has stirred other readers to defense and rejoinder and is therefore alive today. Its most salutary assumption is that a novel should be read, responded to and taken into our experience as a living book (even if it is a

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catafalque to dead matter) rather than as an exercise or puzzle to be figured out after we finish reading. The value of such criticism is inseparable from the partisan urgency of the beliefs and attitudes impelling it, and from the stylistic force with which the attitudes are expressed. Unfortunately, few critics in 1927 seemed interested in taking up the challenge Lewis flung down: the result was that Joyce became either the high priest of a cult, or a newfangled "difficult" writer who might well hold unsound views. After the long critique concludes with some unfriendly remarks about *Work in Progress* ("He has fallen almost entirely into a literary horseplay on the one side, and Steinesque childplay on the other"), Lewis wrote no more on Joyce's art but confined his efforts to baiting the *transition* disciples of the master.

### T. S. Eliot

Lewis' critique of Eliot, found wholly in the third chapter of *Men Without Art,* is still unnoticed; it reveals, I think, that Lewis was more fascinated and annoyed by Eliot's elusive person than by either Pound or Joyce, who compared to the editor of *The Criterion* were guileless. As distinct from their "mindless" craftsmanship, Lewis felt that something very purposeful indeed was going on in Eliot's head at all times, and that the critic had thrown up a number of smoke screens behind which the (supposedly) anonymous poet could go on practising his art. Lewis took it upon himself to expose Eliot, partly it may be out of annoyance at what the writer was getting away with — what he was taken for by unwary readers, partly because Lewis was unsympathetic to certain artistic theories Eliot had successfully promulgated. And, although Lewis himself does not admit it, because Eliot was the most subtle pretender to "classical" status of the Men of 1914.

Lewis admits that Eliot's distinction and influence as a poet is profound, and thinks it not a bad idea that his example has put the fear of careless writing into young poets — though with Auden on the scene Lewis correctly prophesied a change of habit. With this salute out of the way, he says nothing more about Eliot's poetry but, taking as his text some famous remarks from "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and the "Dante" essay, he sets out to examine the "depersonalization" or impersonal theory of poetry, and, bringing in

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I. A. Richards' work, the "disbelief" or pseudo-statement theory of poetry. These theories are related, Lewis argues: both Eliot and Richards have been preoccupied with the meaning of "sincerity" in poetry; both are deeply concerned with the problem of personality in art. Eliot in particular "has paid a good deal of curious attention to the sanctions required for the expression of the thinking subject in verse and prose." This concern is understandable since Eliot has purpose and personality about him; he is not simply exploiting one style after another with an indifference to what is being said.

The passages quoted from the Tradition essay are two: one says that the artist must continually extinguish what is idiosyncratic to his personality and put himself in the service of a larger, more valuable consciousness of the past; the other draws a hard line between art and life by asserting that when the poet does his job correctly he is expressing a medium rather than a personality. Lewis detects Pound's influence in the historical piety of the first remark, but finds the piety not quite so nobly impersonal or "classical" as it appears on the surface. At this point he makes the telling remark about Pound's preference of the scuffle in old Siena to the contemporary one in Detroit; so, even while Eliot invokes the historical sense which recognizes not only the pastness of the past but also its presence, Lewis makes the following important qualification: "But that past is, at the best, seeing its proportions, very selective, and its 'presence' is at the best ideal. You cannot purge it of the glamour of strange lands. Strange times, after all, *are* strange lands, neither more nor less." It is the possible alliance of this historical attitude with the romantic temper that Lewis, still in his *Time and Western Man* mood, speaks out against. He might well have gone on to mention "The Waste Land" as a poetic indication of that temper, insofar as one cannot agree with some commentators that the past is treated as skeptically and disinterestedly as the present. Lewis is equally distrustful of Eliot's insistence that the poet expresses a medium rather than a personality. The "scientist" pretensions of the Tradition essay are brought out by a mischievous suggestion that it has a good deal in common with Bertrand Russell's behaviorist account of the psyche — surely not an account Eliot was anxious to support. More positively — and here the disagreement expresses itself most simply and boldly — even in the dark days of the thirties there may still be

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*something* to say for that much-maligned entity, the personality, at least so far as artist rather than scientist is concerned:

> I do not mean an individualist abortion, bellowing that it wants at all costs to "express" itself, and feverishly answering the advertisement of the quack who promises to develop such things overnight. I mean only a constancy and consistency in being, as concretely as possible, *one thing* — at peace with itself, if not with the outer world, though that is likely to follow after an interval of struggle. . . .

Such a defense seems in part prophetic of the kind of coming to terms with self Eliot was to achieve in *Four Quartets*.

Lewis' defense of the self is of a piece with his rejection of what he terms the "disbelief" theory of reading poetry as developed by I. A. Richards. As might be expected, the imaginative ability to convert a poem's "truths" into mere "attitudes" and thus to enter into a poem no matter what it says, accepting or at least obediently entertaining its doctrine, was a notion of the ideal reader that held no interest for Lewis. Though he does not say it, one might speculate that both Richards' disbelief theory and Eliot's impersonal one make their strongest appeal to youthful readers, excited by the variety of literature and not very sure about what their own selves look like, or whether they even have selves. As the lines are drawn more firmly (Lewis was fifty-one when he wrote this critique) such imaginative tolerance may begin to look like diffusion or dilettantism. Both Eliot and Richards are expounding theories that do not promote the difficult attempt to be oneself, or to find out what that self may be. For this reason Lewis must argue that Eliot's insistence on impersonality is really a trick, that there are only ways and ways of being personal, and that one of them — a very subtle one — is to pretend your poems have nothing to do with your "real" personality. Eliot's position is a result, in Lewis' shrewd guess, of a theologically sensitive poet's effort to separate the admirable from the unsatisfactory in his personality, giving the former to art and perhaps — we may conjecture — asking to be forgiven for the latter in life.

In a revealing passage of summary Lewis both articulates his difference from Eliot and, incidentally, prefigures the increasingly free-swinging character of his own fiction:

> The personality is not, I think, quite the pariah it becomes in the pages of Mr. Eliot: I do not believe in the anonymous, "imper-

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> sonal," catalytic, for the very good reason that I am sure the personality is in that as much as in the other part of this double-headed oddity, however thoroughly disguised, and is more apt to be a corrupting influence in that arrangement than in the more usual one, where the artist is identified with his beliefs. If there is to be an "insincerity," I prefer it should occur in the opposite sense — namely that "the man," the personality should exaggerate, a little artificially perhaps, his beliefs . . . the man is thus "most himself" (even if a little too much himself to be quite the perfect self, on occasion). . . .

The firm good temper and good sense of this passage is attractive for the way it lets us know that Mr. Wyndham Lewis is not quite the perfect self, but very much himself, and that *there* finally is the temperamental basis for rejecting Eliot's theory. Good temper, expressed through a colloquial ease that runs toward garrulity, unites with psychological acuteness about motives and an ability to imagine what other people are up to by reading between the lines they write or say. These qualities become especially apparent when Lewis' critique of Eliot is contrasted to a recent attack on the impersonal theory by F. R. Leavis, the critical insight of which is marred by its tone of bitterly moralistic reproof.[4] Lewis' essay, while it makes essentially the same point twenty-five years earlier, is notable throughout for its vigorous wit, most of which is inseparable from the strength of the point made. For example, he does not let pass without comment Eliot's denigration of Matthew Arnold in *The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism*; but rather than content himself with high-toned reproof, or suggestions that Arnold was a finer critic than Eliot, Lewis simply notices that Eliot has coupled I. A. Richards with Arnold, both men having had the temerity to hope that the world might be saved by poetry. The technique of guilt by association is rapidly exposed, not by heavy argument to prove that Arnold and Richards are treated unfairly, but through an instant deflation of Eliot's austere finger-wagging:

> Mr. Eliot is accusing Mr. Richards of being like Arnold! Having degraded Arnold into the position of an inferior critic, to his complete satisfaction . . . it then occurs to him as an excellent idea to send people he does not approve of to join Arnold — like *sending to Coventry,* a little! Matthew Arnold becomes a sort of purgatory to which unsatisfactory people are dispatched. . . .

4 "T. S. Eliot's Stature as Critic," (*Commentary*, November, 1958).

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Remarks like this provide the distinctive note of Lewis' critiques and give them a grace of tone which might even have recommended them to the writers under fire.

A full account of Lewis' criticism would go on to deal with his treatment (usually adverse) of modern novelists: Hemingway, Faulkner, Virginia Woolf, Lawrence and others. But it would only confirm what many no doubt feel to be the major limitation of this criticism as it can be inferred from the exposures of Pound, Joyce and Eliot: namely, does it not turn out to be the case that *all* writers but Wyndham Lewis stand condemned as insufficiently classical? A good deal has been made, rightly so, of Lewis' tendencies toward monomania; yet he was himself conscious of the monomaniacal aspects of claiming to be the only really sanely disenchanted author in a deluded world of shams, illusionists and secret romantics in classical clothing. He recognized and on one occasion forcefully admitted that the world of twentieth-century disasters made a mockery of any particular claims on a novelist or a poet's part to be practicing in the classical tradition as opposed to his misguided fellow-practitioners: "To be impersonal rather than personal; universal rather than provincial; rational rather than a mere creature of feeling — these . . . are very fine things indeed: but who possesses more than a tincture of them today? . . . With all of us — and to this there is no exception — there are merely *degrees* of the opposite tendency, at present labeled 'romantic.'" The admission, from *Men Without Art,* is one of those fine moments in which a satirist-critic suddenly includes himself in instead of merely constructing hells for other people. Perhaps in this light we can recall the sentence from *Paleface* I quoted at the beginning of this piece: "Yet an art that is 'subjective' and can look to no common factors of knowledge or feelings, and lean on no tradition, is exposed to the necessity . . . of instructing itself far more profoundly as to the origins of its impulses and the nature and history of the formulas with which it works." Far more profoundly, that is, than the "objective" classical art no modern writer can pretend to. The instruction of one's contemporaries, then, may be equally self-instruction, and if in a sense his critical exposures of other writers left Lewis high and dry, they may just as truly — on the evidence of the novels he was to write — have inspired him to come to terms with the formulas and impulses of his own fiction.

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# POEMS

## MORAL DREAM

A little girl in white, gold-haired,
came to my dream and brought a gift:
it was the doll of Christ. I was elect!,
not by my virtù but by dreams equipped
to take the gift. Oh Gift-Taker, Sir
Equipment to the goddess Pedophilia,
she came to my bed in long gold hair,
and what I did with her I do not know
because I slept in sleep. When I awoke,
asleep, I found her head balled in the bone
crux of my elbow's calipers. She had
a dead man's face to measure: young
Hitler's, curdled in the flesh, with black
straight hair and two front teeth
knocked out: he was the dead doll of Christ.
I felt an instantaneous tree of ice
invade my nervous system and connect
dreams' dreams to an historical reality.
Thus, I expected subsequent atrocities
and woke for whiskey and an armed life.

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## I DREAMED I GOT A LETTER FROM EZRA POUND

Oh I got jammed among the bodies as
they yelled away the air, enclosed. I slept
naked between two living pains. My chin-
bone plowed the floorboards as my talk,
all teeth, chewed at the salty ankle of
a raving man. I have been sent here
to commit the psychopaths to violence
and have succeeded. I have my disciples.

## DEFENDANT

Someone kicked him so he limped.
Someone hit him and his flinch
shriveled his spine. He crawled to court
in answer to an ad that read:
"Justice, to be done, demands
some practice on whoever comes
in any way bent to her hand."

**Alan Dugan**

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## VOICE ON AN ANT-HILL

Almost believing the mysteries of two millennia,
I had come to doubt the existence of such
Anomalies as this; for, viewing the broad
Expanse of perfectly measured blades of grass,
For example, or the roads so evenly paved, or houses
Steady against the winds, each with its purpose,
Each fulfilling a destiny as arranged by man,
And man in turn by some other, greater
Forces, the greater mysteries, I reacted to it
At first as one might react to the breaking of a glass,
Quite simply, as an accident.
Staring at the little pile of earth, I thought
Of the intricate system of tunnels burrowed beneath,
And the divisions of the inhabitants: workers and
warriors and queen;
I crushed it with my foot, stamping, scattering
the results
Of their labors, for it seemed somehow a danger.
But where did the danger lie? Was it the ant-hill?
Was it the foot kicking at the scattered earth?
Was there a link, however subtle, between
What I had done and what might be done?
I knew neither act nor motive.

**John A. Williams**

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## GIRL SINGING

The partridge, the russet bird,
Lies gently on the cutting board
Between the blue bowl
And the sea-green decanter.
And a young girl is singing,
"A partridge in a pear tree,"
Adding, in a free contralto,
All those increments that return
Always to the partridge in
The pear tree. Perhaps she has
Only now turned from the mirror
Or put her diary aside,
Roused unknowing by a second life
She has received from the russet bird.
It is like some genre painting
Come alive with a touch of blood.
I note this without irony,
And I intend no danger.
One tress hanging down,
She bends over it as over
A baby she is going to powder.
I do not know for certain
That she is serenading the bird,
Or why our spreading increments,

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Like a pear tree of the winter,
Retrace, between a bowl of one color
And a decanter of another,
The crooked steps to the russet root,
While somewhere a free contralto,
Perched with two lives in an auburn tress,
Clothes the tree with populous song
—As I am here in a winter scene
Reasoning and yet with delight,
My voice, beyond me, conjoining
With hers in the floating air;
And it is sweet to be
The bright cold sky
In winter time and any time,
And all the snow that lies between
And the partridge and the pear tree.

**Irving Feldman**

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# POE THE DETECTIVE

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## *The Mystery of Marie Roget*

**by John Walsh**

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—DONALD SUTHERLAND, *The New Leader* $7.50

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Richard Gilman

# ART AND HISTORY

Among other uses every art appears to lend itself to History by possessing a history of its own. How much more does Art, the totality of aesthetic works as well as the abstraction by which we hold in consciousness the faculty that produces them, seem to possess the historical as one of its attributes and identifications? We speak of the "development" of the novel, the "course" of music, the "fate" of poetry. We talk about movements, revolutions and returns (neo-this and neo-that), about avant-gardes (spearheads, colonizers of the future) and academicisms (wrongheaded repetitions performed in despite of time and change). One of our thoroughly contemporary notions about art is that of "crisis," which means that we have come to see it as periodically trapped between a closed-off past and a not-yet-open future, which however must sooner or later come to open, as all future does.

All this habit of mind — art seen as history, as chronological extension and time filling up with truth or beauty — is on the analogy of general human history, which, dominating the way we see time, dominates whatever is produced within its walls. And in the same way that thinking of life as history is, beneath its purely technical uses, in the interest of reassurance, so thinking of art as history serves as reassurance too. For whatever the local, provisional quality of events and enterprises, however painful, worn, inadequate or perverse existence may seem at any time, the fact that it is going to go on — that there will always be more of this self-secreting substance, the historical — means that there are going to be new chances, possibilities, accessions and revivals, for art as well as life. Every new generation makes this more or less explicit, ours more than most; we are always in the way of having everything made good.

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What may seem to be a hatred of history or a repudiation, such as characterizes our own time and in one way or another the entire American experience and its historical bases, is more often than not a willed freedom from particular histories rather than a relinquishing of the habit of casting experience into historical molds. When such a relinquishing does occur, it is almost always in association with the aesthetic as the principle of deliverance. But this is most frequently a matter not of art as aesthetic creation but as dream, myth, a potential way of nonhistorical life, such as is appropriated by bohemians at all times. But the true relation of art to the historical is usually no better understood by bohemians than by anybody else.

Art is the only unbetrayable revolution, the only one that does not restore history in a new guise. And one must argue that behind all particular revolutions in the arts is a culminating sense of history as an occlusion, a maker of impasses, a narrowing light. For the artist, history, the history of his own art, is reassuring only at the beginning, when it grants him a provisional identity as a worker in its line, an apprentice, and provides him with indications of what is to be done. But the artist finds (and it can be at once, like Rimbaud at fifteen, or quite late, like Yeats at forty-five) that he has to resist the temptation and pressure to draw from a bag of tricks which have all been used before — history is what has been used before — and that to be an artist means nothing less than to invent, to "come upon" what has not yet existed.

"Everything the artist invents is true," Flaubert said, a more profound remark than it might appear. For it is extraordinarily difficult really to invent, against the multiplicity of patents taken out by previous artists. But that is what has to be done, menacing as it will always seem to all strategies of continuity, and indistinguishable as it will often appear from a quest for mere novelty. Art has even had to invent its apparent disgust and even its seeming death, in order to make of its gestures new parabolas, new connections between the imagination and the materials life presents to it for reconstitution. To revolt is to invent at full speed, to seek new and unprecedented assurance in an act of creation whose one gift is its own appearance, its demonstration that it continues to be possible for men to shape realities outside history.

The contemporary crisis as it concerns art lies just there: we do

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not fully believe that such a thing is possible, which means that we have lost the sense (never widely or wholeheartedly supported) of art as wrestler with history rather than as an aspect of its expression. A tenacious resistance of academic thinking (historical thinking in its quintessential form), and of a humanism trying to add to its justifications, goes on obscuring the truth that physical events, or "real" events, including the lives of artists, have one history, and aesthetic events, without following an arbitrary course and without lacking in their own kind of reality, have another. Thinking of the arts as the embodiment or reflection, most subtly as the formalization — the "aestheticization" — of social or moral or psychological history continues to dominate the academic's teaching and most critical practice. Against how many pieties does one bump if one sets out to demonstrate that the chief impulse of the truest art has always been to serve, in no merely figurative sense, as compensations and atonements for such histories, for History as the annals of our deficiency.

If it is at all historical (if it has a relation, that is to say, to chronologies outside itself) art is a counter-history; the surprises, blessings, threats and transformations it offers are distinguished by the remarkable fact that they might not have been, that they have made their appearance as the result of a kind of smuggling operation, that they stand outside history as a species of alternative to it. So positioned, they are not subject to any law of historical development (although to a principle of change kept in being by the new shapes history continually throws up) nor to inevitability of any kind. Only when, as periodically happens, an art succumbs to human history, stopping dead in its tracks under the weight of demand that it fulfill one or another social or moral or psychological function and above all that it fulfill it as before, the way previous art has been considered to do, does it surrender its freedom. New artists, new art, then come forward to reclaim it; although there is nothing inevitable even about that.

Of all the arts the theater, perennially broken down, forever lacking fuel, is perhaps the one most given to predicting its own future, or rather, asserting, with dogged, blind, quasi-mystical assurance, that it is going to have one. The theater has always survived, so the almost prayerful argument runs, its history being one of perpetual recovery from dry spells, wrong turnings and persecution.

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A great and central human activity, it is the most communal of all the arts, the most inclusive and ubiquitous. Its history is very nearly coeval with mankind's since even before its reputed origin in ritual the first time a gesture was made which announced that a gesture was being made, the first time somebody "acted," performing symbolically instead of with a straightforward, useful, physical end in view, there was the beginning of theater.

From this origin the theater, formalized, diversified and multiplied into a wide-ranging institution full of both steadily accumulating myth and continually renewed technical consciousness, has become one of our chief public ways of knowing ourselves and even more of getting round our finiteness. This is to say that for a certain space of time it allows us to be not ourselves but our reflections, impersonations, doubles and dream children, our possibilities and theoretical incarnations. How can the impulse to bring these things into being, buckled securely on to a history as it is, ever come to an end?

Yet it may very well be coming to an end in the form in which we have known it. That latter form may go on making public representations of itself, alive in the history outside art, as portrait painters still go on exhibiting their outmoded visions, but the center of the art of drama will be elsewhere, if any art of drama finds it possible to survive. For the theater has discovered — or rather uncovered to our sight — that in the past fifteen years or so its perennial crisis, that joke, lugubrious weather or occupational disease, has taken on a deadly edge. The crisis is now one neither of style nor subject nor economic feasibility nor relevance, but of existence itself. And what lies behind the widespread failure to become aware of it, to do more than lament the current doldrums while preserving the core of faith unshaken, is the tyranny of the idea of historical inevitability and the gross, fanatic pressure of habit.

To its first Parisian audiences in the early nineteen fifties the new drama whose principal executors were Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco came variously as an enigma, a revelation, a curiosity or a good or bad joke. Without being wholly unprecedented (there are always precedents for the movements of the imagination; the avant-garde, Ionesco was later to write, "always constitutes a restoration, a return") these new plays were publicly unprepared for. Having leaped over the immediate theatrical past, they might have seemed to

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exhibit connections with an older experimental mode, but to have identified that, to have said, ah yes, Surrealism, would have been entirely mistaken. For *The Bald Soprano*, *The Lesson* and *Waiting for Godot* were not surrealist in any meaning which the word had previously possessed. Their movement was precisely toward the infra-real: nothing "above" or "beyond," no cozying up to the presumed divinity in the automatic operation of the mind, no raid upon dreams or other sources of transconsciousness. "The surreal is here," Ionesco was to say, "within the grasp of our hands, in our everyday conversation."

He might still use the word -- any word which pointed to a renewed freedom for consciousness or an attempt to transform its bases would do; later "absurd" would be fastened on himself, Beckett and others — but what was at issue was that the "real," as it became the material for the dramatic imagination, brought with it a power of cliché and conventional iconography to which the imagination had increasingly succumbed. Art had been added to reality; and reality had revenged itself, as it always does, by sending back to the aesthetic field of operation its own face distorted by artifice. Reality in drama was reality as previous drama had imagined and shaped it. To break this deadlock meant for playwrights like Beckett and Ionesco to deal cannily in their different ways with just what Surrealism had so strenuously repudiated: matter-of-fact vocabularies, ordinary *mises-en-scène, anti-dream.*

A grossly upholstered English sitting-room, a language professor's seedy studio, a scrubby piece of anonymous ground were the new arenas in which was taking place the latest attempt to deliver the stage from everything predictable and reassuring, everything heretofore aesthetically legitimized, whether it was the consolation of a mirror image or that of an exotic dream, that the theater had been offering for so long. A couple who establish that they are married to one another by tracing their steps back to having awakened that morning in the same house, in the same room and finally the same bed, and who find this an "extraordinary, bizarre coincidence"; two tramps whose major "actions" consist in eating radishes and carrots and in taking off and putting back on their shoes, who perform a play which seems throughout to be waiting for known dramatic principles to start operating: such were the new characters and plots

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which by their implicit mockery of "real" characters and plots gave a new blow to the latter's self-sufficiency and imperium in drama.

Uneasily kicked against, sporadically violated but never wholly thrown off, a fixed conception of what characters were supposed to be and of what plots were supposed to make them do had lain at the heart of the practice of drama ever since it had passed its so-called heroic crest several centuries before. Such a conception was in fact the enervated and abstracted essence of the soul of that earlier drama, the outcome of its passage from actuality — from being plays created and performed at a time and in a place — to a condition of ideality, its alteration from process into proposition.

Twenty years before *Waiting for Godot,* to which Beckett had come after a series of brilliant coups against the remaining entrenchments of fiction, he had written these words about James Joyce: "he is not writing about something; he is writing something." What had become at least theoretically unassailable as the main tenet of serious fiction — that literature is its own reality, that fictive language is a new, concrete, independent fact — had in drama, the slowest of the arts to register or contribute to an era's broad aesthetic and philosophical changes, been a troubled aspiration, a scent of freedom, a series of inconclusive forays into forms that were perpetually made to smack of eccentricity and arbitrary capers. Such is the theater's conservatism and committee-like soul.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, at just the point when drama seemed to have settled into mere, absolute reproduction of itself, the German playwright and critic Friedrich Hebbel had set down in his journals truths which we are still trying to overtake and turn into exemplifications:

> All dramatic art has to do with impropriety and incomprehension.
>
> To present the necessary in the form of the accidental — that is the whole principle of dramatic style.
>
> Drama shouldn't present new stories but new relationships.

The latter remark might have been as much elegaic as hortatory, since Hebbel had risen out of an era which had contained the remarkable but hermetic achievements of Friedrich Buechner, Heinrich von Kleist and Christian Dietrich Grabbe. These three German

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geniuses had all died young and unexalted after having written dramas which must have seemed like monstrous sick dreams in an age of classical repression. Stemming from rules discovered in the self, wayward, nervous, "neurotic" and blackly visionary, their plays were to prove crucial to a future drama. But what was most significant about them was not their independent morale, their more accurate psychology or their discovery of demons in an era of Goethean rationality. Technically, dramaturgically, they cleared the ground for new uses of the scenic art.

Their plays differed widely from one another but were united by the way they swerved violently away from story-telling and character–building to dispose themselves as original universes in which conflict was between elements and faculties far more than between personages or personalities, and in which language pressed forward to become a kind of plot in itself, a drama. When they were rediscovered generations later, when, that is to say, what they had accomplished was felt once again, after the renewed occlusions of history, to be *necessary,* it was with a sense of enormous wonder, a dizzying contemplation of their green islands as seen from an exhausted mainland. And this mainland might have been described as a large body of theory and practice that had itself been cut off from any new and fertile propositions.

A digression may be permitted here for a word about "mainlands" in drama, or in any other art for that matter. This persistent notion, this geography whose nomenclature is built around the continental designations "realism," "symbolism," "romanticism" and so on, remains the bulwark of academic defense against art and the chief instrument of its submission to human polity. Art hasn't for a long time been susceptible to being codified in any such way, if it ever was at all. The terminology, and its being wielded in the interests of rational control over culture, is the product of a pedagogical sortie against everything that had threatened society's accumulating knowledge; to force art into *being* knowledge has been the master stroke that cut off its roots in ritual and play and mysterious otherness of presence.

In the same way, the idea of succession in the arts, that chronological dragon which swallows up almost all true response in the urgency to construct assimilable sequences — social novel, psycho-

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logical novel, poetic novel, etc. — and so turn art into history, is what keeps us from seeing what the artist is and why he has continually to repudiate what he has been thought to be. It keeps us from seeing that at any one time the subject of an art and its manner are almost wholly provisional and interrogatory, not answers but questions and at the same time screens behind which the next subject and the next manner are being prepared. The subject and manner — content and form — are of course indissoluble, but more than that they are revolutionary precisely in their meeting, in their not having found any other way to exist except through each other. And the revolution is always against the previous rebellion, that which had thought to fix the continuing questions into replies, so that in the hey-day of the so-called social novel the "psychological" novel was already advancing a more radical art (as Balzac recognized about Stendhal); during, not after the reign of impressionism, "post-impressionism" was sketching a new visual kingdom.

This is why the seemingly miraculous flowering of drama in the first decades of the nineteenth century in Germany is not to be considered an aberration, something isolated, premature and off-center. To abstract it into the linear perspective of time, to deplete it by making it an historical conundrum, something which throws chronological understanding out of whack, is to end up by being literally unable to account for it. If it arose outside the charted course of time, in other words, we bring it back in the form of the exceptional. And such are our habits that not being able to account for it — the exceptional is that which can't be accounted for — we preserve it in eccentric and isolated existence and look elsewhere for what we consider the true historical course of drama.

That course leads us to the theater, which we go on identifying with drama as though there were not a deep tension between them, one which has grown more exacerbated in our time but which has actually been exhibiting itself continuously since a breakdown occurred in their relationship sometime in the seventeenth century. In this tension between drama as an act of the individual mind and theater as an act of what we may call the social body lie the roots of the crisis which, as I have said, we persist in seeing as merely local and as being resolvable by will, wit or magic.

Popular expectation and hardened definitions afflict all the arts:

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the novel was and still is expected to be a narrative, music was supposed to be tonal and harmonic, painting to represent and so forth. But the drama faces something more than this; the public nature of the theater and what can only be called the too-human content of its operations work inevitably to keep the drama isolated from aesthetic changes and help account for its conservatism and lag, its periodic irrelevance. The drama finds itself pressed to the past by a cultural expectation reinforced by the practicalities of theater, by physical and social exigencies: a necessary physical plant, seats to be filled, a community of skills to be organized and held together, technical apparatus to be on hand, a score of other functional considerations — props, lighting, tickets and ticket takers, fire extinguishers, charwomen, ushers, press agents, programs and much more.

All this investment, these stakes, this as it were municipal and clerical disposition of things, are what help to bind the theater to the historical, to what has already been done and what has already been known. And one result of this is that avant-garde and traditional are more widely separated in the theater than in the literary and graphic arts, although not in music or the dance, which are locked into the material world in the same way as drama. From this rises the fact that a body of repetitive, banal and compromised work perpetually occupies most of the space in the theater while everything original is crowded into corners.

The struggle simply to find a space on stage, to rescue itself from the fate of being nothing but dramatic literature, has marked the course of contemporary drama ever since artist-playwrights who had emerged, miraculously it sometimes seems, from an age of mere artisans, began to write it. That drama could be an art, issuing from the same order of aspiration, consciousness and morale as poetry, music, painting or the novel, had virtually to be newly established after the nineteenth-century theater's long sterility. And in order to establish this, to extricate itself from the theater as an institution while retaining it as the necessary physical ground, the "place for seeing" (the original meaning of the word), dramatists had to be guileful, to use the theater against itself, by practicing a form of judo. Artist-playwrights had to present most of their visions under the guise of something else, in order to satisfy audience expectation on one level while working out insurrectionary programs on another. They

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had to accept, and still have to accept, that they are allowed to be artists only as the outcome of a struggle with their technic more exhausting and consuming than we know of anywhere else in the life of culture.

A pious myth retains its force: that the communal nature of the theater is its major strength, heart of its energizing mysteries and source of its values. Yet the truth is that as the theater sank more and more into *divertissement* its communal nature bound it more and more closely to the perversion of its possibilities, to banality, repetition and sentimental acts. The audience for the theater has for a long time now been much more of a quasi-sophisticated mob than a conscious collectivity, it is a horde seeking banality or else, in another mood, sensation. To such an audience, as Henry James once pointed out, sensations are what pass for augmentations of consciousness, and it has been the sensational aspects of modern drama that have gained it its public recognition. A phenomenon not wholly different from the fate of the other arts, it nevertheless has been more maiming here, less easy to surmount. For paintings and novels and poems may surmount their scandalous successes by introducing themselves into the private consciousness where response and judgment have at least the possibility of being freer.

The sensations of new drama are clearly so much more public and immediate than those of the literary or graphic arts. *Right out there in the middle of society* its altered sounds and shapes are experienced in one mood as heightened *divertissement,* in another as affront and a kind of treason. What will not be experienced, except by isolated individuals who in this very process distinguish themselves from the horde of which they are physically a part, is the drama as a work of art, as unreal, that is to say as the product of an escape from time and from that life in which sensations function as surrogates for consciousness. The sensations of new drama, like those of any new art, are instead its means of access into consciousness.

They are also the signs of its struggle with itself, or rather with its own history. Like a war waged with an external enemy while a civil conflict goes on simultaneously, contemporary drama has fought a double battle: against the theater and its audiences drugged with tradition and received notions of the dramatic, and against its own assumptions, its accumulated existence, the dead hand of its accom-

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plished artifacts and the coating of reality — its source and nutriment — with its own images and metaphors, the "dramatization" of actual life through the example of created dramas.

The true history of contemporary drama as an art is the gradual erosion of the sanctified image of man on the stage, man as character, destiny as plot, and at the same time the increasingly radical questioning by playwrights and other theater artists of drama's own bases and *raison d'être*. And much of this history has taken place on the sly, behind a barrage of aggressive gestures, a great many of which have been feints. From Ibsen's embattled dealings with the well-made play and his final, partial movement beyond it, through Strindberg's replacement of rational character by dream and psychic adventure and Pirandello's ironic dramatization of rationality as itself the source of delusion, down to Brecht's objectifications of the traditionally subjective and Beckett's motionless plays of language — the common thread has been an heroic effort to make the drama do something new, while battling for its sheer existence as a form and a public act.

For the majority of audiences as well as for all but a handful of critics (compared with modern literary criticism that of drama has been notoriously thin, wary, lashed to tradition and inherited definitions, the best of it often produced by men who are not ostensibly drama critics at all) the major new dramatic propositions of the past eighty or ninety years have been either thematic, statements about the psyche, society or human destiny, or purely technical, tinkerings with a stalled machine or else, in the eyes of technological optimists, an intransigent progression on the model of technique's life in science or mechanics.

The real revolution, a change in conception of what is actually dramatic, a birth of consciousness about the possibility that all known forms of the dramatic may be exhausted, remains largely unseen outside those widely spaced small matrices where original work is still going on and morale remains besieged but not yet overthrown. A number of recent phenomena testify to the newest confrontation with history, its own and that of the world it inhabits, which drama is engaged in at this moment. Happenings and environments represent the most extreme form of a repudiation of the artificial procedures of traditional drama, an attempt to topple the text as sovereign power and to reconstitute acting as the gestures of nonprofessionals, a set of

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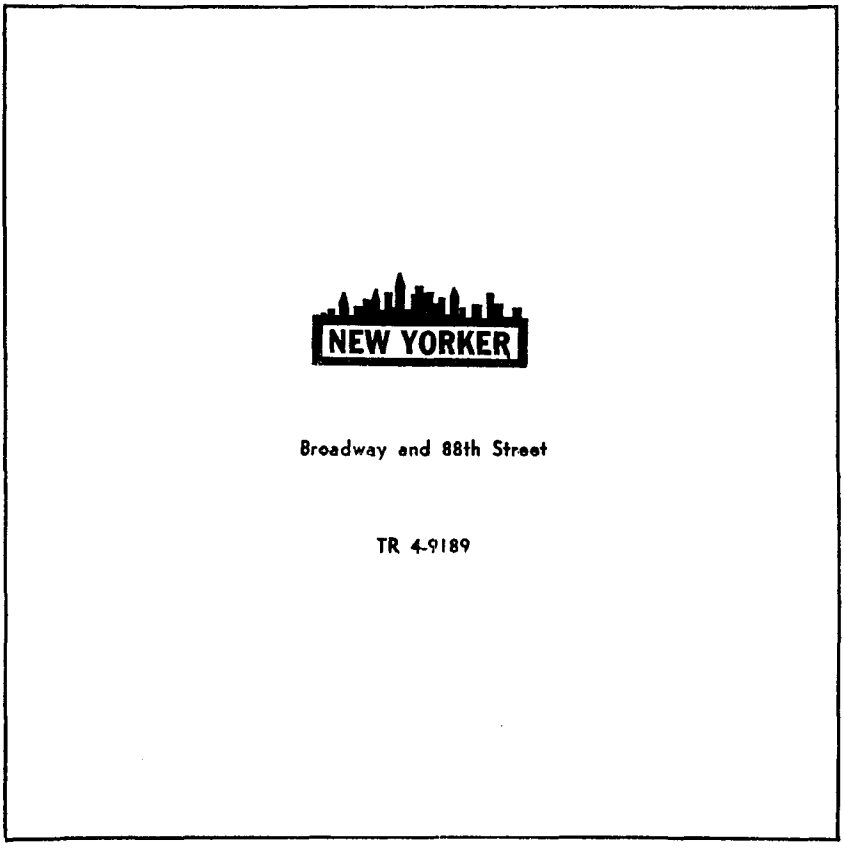
motions like any others and one carried out in what is meant to be society's quotidian midst instead of being placed before it as if on a platter. Theaters of cruelty and of polemical immediacy issue from a despair of drama's effectiveness under its old aesthetic patents as much as from a disgust with the theater of public consolation and confirmation, what Brecht meant by the "culinary" stage.

It may be that nothing will come forward as new, unassailable creation. It is surely true that any art comes to find that its own historical momentum becomes the enemy of its renewable prowess. About ten years ago Eric Bentley wrote an essay entitled "Is Drama an Extinct Species?" to which question he found himself able to give a negative answer. But the question remains open. And meanwhile the history which gave rise to it is there to be examined.

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# GOING TO THE MOVIES

## GODARD

The relation to models offered by literature illuminates a major part of the history of cinema. Film, both protected and patronized by virtue of its dual status as mass entertainment and as art form, remains the last bastion of the values of the nineteenth-century novel and theater — even to many of the same people who have found accessible and pleasurable such post-novels as *Ulysses, Between the Acts, The Unnameable, Naked Lunch* and *Pale Fire,* and the corrosively de-dramatized dramas of Beckett, Pinter and the Happenings. Thus, the standard criticism leveled against Godard is that his plots are undramatic, arbitrary, often simply incoherent; and that his films generally are emotionally cold, static except for a busy surface of senseless movements, top-heavy with undramatized ideas, unnecessarily obscure. What his detractors don't grasp, of course, is that Godard doesn't want to do what they reproach him for not doing. Thus, audiences at first took the jump-cuts in *Breathless* to be a sign of amateurishness, or a perverse flouting of self-evident rules of cinematic technique; actually, what looks as though the camera had stopped inadvertently for a few seconds in the course of a shot and then started up again was an effect Godard deliberately obtained in the cutting room, by snipping pieces out of perfectly smooth takes. (If one sees *Breathless* today, however, the once obtrusive cutting and the oddities of the hand-held camera are almost invisible, so widely imitated are these techniques now.) No less deliberate is Godard's disregard for the formal conventions of film narration based on the nineteenth-century novel — cause-and-effect sequences of events, climactic scenes, logical denouements. At the Cannes Film Festival several years ago, Godard entered into debate with Georges Franju, one of France's most talented and idiosyncratic senior directors. "But surely, Monsieur Godard," the exasperated Franju is reported to have said at one point, "you do at least acknowledge the necessity of having

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a beginning, middle, and end in your films." "Certainly," Godard replied, "But not necessarily in that order."

Still, unsatisfactory as the plots of his films may be to many people, it would hardly be correct to describe Godard's films as plotless — like, say, Djiga Vertov's *The Man With the Camera,* the two silent films of Buñuel (*L'Age d'Or, Un Chien Andalou*) or Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising,* films in which a story-line has been completely discarded as the narrative framework. As in many conventional feature films, Godard proposes an interrelated group of fictional characters located in a recognizable, contemporary, usually urban landscape (Paris), but the sequence of events suggests a fully articulated story without adding up to one. The audience is presented with a narrative line that is partly erased or effaced (the structural equivalent of the jump-cut). Disregarding the traditional novelist's rule of explaining things as fully as they seem in need of explanation, Godard provides simplistic motives or frequently leaves motives unexplained; actions are often opaque, and fail to issue into consequences; occasionally the dialogue itself is not entirely audible. (Of course, there are other films, like Rossellini's *Journey to Italy* and Resnais' *Muriel,* employing a comparably "unrealistic" system of narration, in which the story is decomposed into disjunct objectified elements; but Godard, the only director with a whole body of work along these lines, has suggested more of the diverse routes for "abstracting" from an ostensibly realistic narrative than any other director. It is important, too, to distinguish various structures of abstracting — as, for instance, between the systematically "indeterminate" plot of Bergman's *Persona* and the "intermittent" plots of Godard's films.)

Thus, it is precisely the presence, not the absence, of story in Godard's films that gives rise to the standard criticism made of them. Godard's modifying, rather than making a complete rupture with, the conventions of prose fiction underlying the main tradition of cinema seems to have made more difficulties for audiences than the forthright "poetic" or "abstract" narration practiced by the official cinematic avant-garde. Another difficulty is the sources from which Godard draws some of the plots he will modify but not altogether obliterate. Like many directors, he prefers mediocre, even subliterary material, finding it easier to dominate and transform by the *mise-en-scène.* "I don't really like telling a story," Godard has written, somewhat simplifying the matter. "I prefer to use a kind of tapestry, a background on which I can embroider my own ideas. But I generally do need a story. A conventional one serves as well, perhaps even best." Thus, Godard has ruthlessly described the novel on which his brilliant

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*Contempt* was based, Moravia's *Ghost at Noon,* as "a nice novel for a train journey, full of old-fashioned sentiments. But it is with this kind of novel that one can make the best films." Although *Contempt* stays close to Moravia's story, Godard's films usually show few traces of their literary origins. At the other extreme but more typical is *Masculine Feminine,* which bears no recognizable relation to the stories by Maupassant, "La Femme de Paul" and "La Signe," from which Godard drew his original inspiration.

But whether used as text or pretext, it hasn't ordinarily been a novel of old-fashioned sentiments that Godard has chosen as his point of departure, but heavily-plotted action stories. He has a particular fondness for American *kitsch. Made in U.S.A.* was based on *The Jugger* by Richard Stark, *Pierrot le Fou* on *Obsession* by Lionel White and *Band of Outsiders* on Dolores Hitchens' *Fool's Gold.* Godard resorts to popular American narrative conventions as a fertile, solid basis for his own antinarrative inclinations. "The Americans know how to tell stories very well; the French not at all. Flaubert and Proust don't know how to narrate; they do something else." Though that something else is plainly what Godard is after too, he has discerned the utility of starting from crude narrative. One allusion to this strategy is the memorable dedication of *Breathless:* "To Monogram Pictures." (In its original version, *Breathless* had no credit titles whatever, and the first image of the film was preceded only by this terse salute to Hollywood's most prolific purveyors of low-budget quickie action pictures during the nineteen thirties and early nineteen forties.) Godard wasn't being impudent or flippant here — or only a little bit. Melodrama is one of the integral resources of his plotting. Think of the comic-strip quest of *Alphaville;* the gangster-movies romanticism of *Breathless, Band of Outsiders* and *Made in U.S.A.;* the spy-thriller ambiance of *Le Petit Soldat* and *Pierrot le Fou.* For, precisely melodrama — which is characterized by the exaggeration, the frontality, the opaqueness of "action" — provides a framework for both intensifying and transcending traditional realistic procedures of serious film narrative, but in a way which isn't necessarily condemned (as the Surrealist films were) to seeming esoteric. By adapting familiar, second-hand, vulgar materials — popular myths of action and sexual glamor — Godard gains a considerable freedom to "abstract" without losing the possibility of a commercial theater audience.

These materials being what they are, Godard's films retain some of the vivacity of their simplistic literary and cinematic models. Even as he employs the narrative conventions of the *Série Noire* novels and the Hollywood thrillers, transposing them into abstract elements, Godard has responded to their casual, sensuous energy and been able to intro-

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duce some of that into his own work. One result is that most of his films give the impression of speed, verging sometimes on haste. In some respects, Godard seems to be applying the same assumptions about material as the great silent director, Louis Feuillade, who worked in the debased form of the crime serial. Feuillade's temperament, though, seems more dogged. On a few essentially limited themes (like ingenuity, ruthlessness, physical grace), Feuillade's films present a seemingly inexhaustible number of formal variations. His choice of the open-ended serial form is thus entirely appropriate. After the twenty episodes of *Les Vampires,* nearly seven hours of projection time, it's clear there was no necessary end to the exploits of the stupendous Musidora and her gang of masked criminals, any more than the exquisitely matched struggle between archcriminal and archdetective in *Judex* need ever end. The rhythm of incident Feuillade establishes is subject to indefinitely prolonged repetition and embellishment, like a sexual fantasy elaborated in secret over a long period of time. Godard's films move to a quite different rhythm; they lack the unity of fantasy, along with its obsessional gravity, and its tireless, somewhat mechanistic repetitiveness.

The difference is accounted for by realizing that, while the hallucinatory, absurd, abstracted action tale is a central resource for Godard, it doesn't control the form of his films as it did for Feuillade. Although melodrama remains one term of Godard's sensibility, what has increasingly emerged as the opposing term is the resources of fact — the impulsive, dissociated tone of melodrama contrasting with the gravity and controlled indignation of the sociological exposé (note the recurrent theme of prostitution in *Une Femme Coquette, My Life to Live, A Married Woman, Deux ou Trois Choses* and *Anticipation),* or the even cooler tones of straight documentary and quasi-sociology (in *Masculine Feminine, La Chinoise).*

Though Godard has toyed with the idea of the serial form, as in the end of *Band of Outsiders* (which promises a sequel, never made, relating further adventures of its hero and heroine in Latin America) and in the general conception of *Alphaville* (proposed as the latest adventure of a French serial hero, Lemmy Caution), Godard's films don't relate unequivocally to any single genre. The open-endedness of Godard's films doesn't mean the hyperexploitation of some particular genre, as in Feuillade, but a successive devouring of genres. The countertheme to the restless activity of the characters in Godard's films is an expressed dissatisfaction with the limits or stereotyping of "actions." Thus, in *Pierrot le Fou,* Marianne's being bored or fed up moves what there is of a plot; at one point she says directly to the camera: "Let's leave the Jules Verne novel, and go back to the *roman policier* with guns and so on."

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The organizing principle of Godard's films is not serial repetitiveness and obsessional elaboration, but the juxtaposition of contrary elements of unpredictable length and explicitness. If Feuillade's work implicitly conceives art as the gratification and prolongation of fantasy, Godard's work implies a quite different function for art: sensory and conceptual dislocation. Each of Godard's films is a totality that undermines itself, what Sartre calls a de-totalized totality.

Instead of a narration unified by the coherence of events (a "plot") and a consistent tone (comic, serious, oneiric, affectless or whatever), the narrative of Godard's films is regularly broken or segmented by the incoherence of events and by abrupt shifts in tone and level of discourse. Events appear to the spectator partly as converging toward a story, partly as a succession of independent tableaux.

The most obvious way Godard segments the forward-moving sequence of narration into tableaux is by explicitly theatricalizing some of his material, once more laying to rest the lively prejudice that there is an essential incompatibility between the means of theater and those of film. The conventions of the Hollywood musical, with songs and stage performances interrupting the story, supply one precedent for Godard — inspiring the general conception of *A Woman Is a Woman,* the dance trio in the café in *Band of Outsiders,* the song sequences and Vietnam protest skit performed on the street in *Pierrot le Fou.* His other model is, of course, the nonrealistic and didactic theater expounded by Brecht. An aspect of Godard's Brechtianizing is his distinctive style of constructing political micro-entertainments: in *La Chinoise,* the home political theater-piece acting out the American aggression in Vietnam; or the Feiffer dialogue of the two ham radio operators that opens *Deux ou Trois Choses.* But the more profound influence of Brecht resides in those formal devices Godard uses to counteract ordinary plot development and complicate the emotional involvement of the audience. One technique is the direct-to-camera declarations by the characters in many films, notably *Deux ou Trois Choses, Made in U.S.A.* and *La Chinoise.* ("One should speak as if one were quoting the truth," says Marina Vlady at the beginning of *Deux ou Trois Choses,* quoting Brecht. "The actors must quote.") Another frequently used technique derived from Brecht is the dissection of the film narrative into short sequences: in *My Life to Live,* not only is this done, but Godard puts on the screen prefatory synopses to each scene which describe the action to follow. Another, simpler device is the relatively arbitrary subdivision of action into numbered sequences, as when the credits of *Masculine Feminine*

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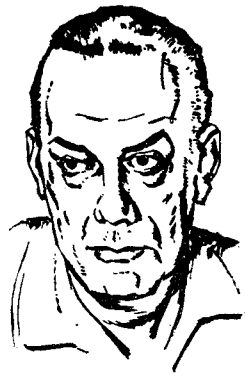

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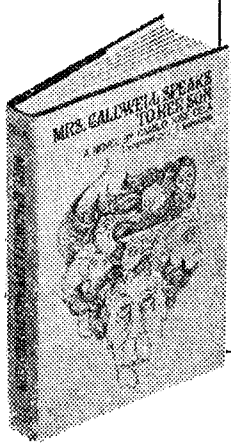

*Chapter 36:* Veronal

It was always the elegant thing to do, my son, to commit suicide with Veronal. It's a suicide for people, for example, who have loved a lot, for people who've never lacked anything, absolutely anything.

Their souls progressively take on an opalescence and an uncertain air, and their bodies languish, little by little, with an elegant sadness, with a studied and pleasing abandon.

Veronal, my son, ought to be taken with champagne, and at night, like resignation.

Women, after taking their Veronal, can allow themselves to be loved by a passionate and respectful lover, by a slow and obliging lover; that is proper. What is not proper, my dear, is the writing of farewell notes.

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announce a film consisting of "fifteen precise actions" *(quinze faits précis)*. A minimal device is the ironic, pseudoquantitative statement of something, as in the brief monologue of Charlotte's little son explaining how to do an unspecified something in exactly ten steps in *A Married Woman.*

Apart from the general strategy of "theater," perhaps the most striking application of the dissociative principle in Godard's narrative technique is his treatment of ideas. Certainly ideas are not developed in Godard's films systematically, as they might be in a book. They aren't meant to be. In contrast to their role in Brechtian theater, ideas are chiefly formal elements in Godard's films, units of sensory and emotional stimulation. They function at least as much to dissociate and fragment as they do to indicate or illuminate the "meaning" of the action. Often the ideas, rendered in blocks of words, lie at a tangent to the action. Nana's reflections on sincerity and language in *My Life to Live,* Bruno's observations about truth and action in *Le Petit Soldat,* the intellectually articulate self-consciousness of Charlotte in *A Married Woman* and of Juliette in *Deux ou Trois Choses,* Lemmy Caution's startling aptitude for cultivated literary allusions in *Alphaville* are not functions of the realistic psychology of these characters. (Perhaps the only one of Godard's intellectually reflective protagonists who still seems "in character" when ruminating is Ferdinand in *Pierrot le Fou.*) Although Godard proposes film discourse as one constantly open to ideas, ideas are only one element in a narrative form in which there is an intentionally ambiguous, open, playful relation of *all* the parts to the total scheme.

A variant on the presence of ideas in Godard's films is the introduction of literary "texts." Among the many instances: the Mayakovsky poem recited by the girl about to be executed by a firing squad in *Les Carabiniers;* the excerpt from the Poe story read aloud in the next-to-last episode in *My Life to Live;* the lines from Dante, Hölderlin and Brecht that Lang quotes in *Contempt;* the passage from Elie Faure's *History of Art* read aloud by Ferdinand to his young daughter in *Pierrot le Fou;* the lines from *Romeo and Juliet* in French translation dictated by the English teacher in *Band of Outsiders;* the scene from Racine's *Bérénice* rehearsed by Charlotte and her lover in *A Married Woman;* the quote from Fritz Lang read aloud by Camille in *Contempt;* the passages from Mao declaimed by the FLN agent in *Le Petit Soldat;* the antiphonal recitations from the little red book in *La Chinoise.* Usually someone makes an announcement before beginning to declaim, or can be seen taking up a book and reading from it. These texts introduce psychologically dissonant elements into the action; they supply rhythmical vari-

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ety (temporarily slowing down the action); they interrupt the action and offer ambiguous comment on it; and they also vary and extend the point of view represented in the film.

Alien to movies as this kind of material may seem, at least in such profusion, Godard would no doubt argue that books and other vehicles of cultural consciousness are part of the world; therefore they belong in films. Indeed, by putting on the same plane the fact that people read and think and go seriously to the movies as the fact that they feel and act, Godard has disclosed a new vein of lyricism and pathos for cinema: in bookishness, in genuine cultural passion, in intellectual callowness, in the misery of someone strangling in his own thoughts. (An instance of Godard's original way with a vein hardly neglected in movies, the poetry of loutish illiteracy, is the twelve-minute sequence in *Les Carabiniers* in which the soldiers unpack their picture-postcard trophies.) His point is that no material is inherently unassimilable. But what's required is that literature indeed undergo its transformation into material, just like anything else. All that can be given are literary extracts, shards of literature. In order to be absorbed by cinema, literature must be dismantled or broken into wayward units; then Godard can appropriate a portion of the intellectual "content" of any book (fiction or nonfiction), borrow from the public domain of culture any contrasting tone of voice (noble or vulgar), invoke in an instant any diagnosis of contemporary malaise that is tactically relevant to his narrative, no matter how inconsistent with the psychological scope or mental competence of the characters as already established it may be. The spectator is almost bound to be misled if he regards these texts simply, either as opinions of characters in the film or as samples of some unified point of view advocated by the film which presumably is dear to the director. More likely, just the opposite is or comes to be the case. Aided by "ideas" and "texts," Godard's film narratives tend to consume the points of view presented in them.

Like the ideas, which function partly as divisive elements, the fragments of cultural lore embedded in Godard's films serve in part as a form of mystification and a means for refracting emotional energy. Inevitably, Godard broaches the menace of the bastardization of culture, a theme most broadly stated in *Contempt* in the figure of the American producer with his booklet of proverbs. And, laden as his films are with furnishings of high culture, it's perhaps equally inevitable that Godard should also treat the project of laying down the burden of culture, as Ferdinand in *Pierrot le Fou* does when he abandons his life in Paris for the romantic journey southward carrying only a book of old comics.

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The theme of cultural disburdenment is treated most fully and ironically in *La Chinoise.* One sequence shows the young cultural revolutionaries purging their shelves of all their books but the little red one. Another brief sequence shows just a blackboard at first, filled with the neatly listed names of several dozen stars of Western culture from Plato to Shakespeare to Sartre; these are then erased one by one, thoughtfully, with Brecht the last to go. The five pro-Chinese students who live together want to have only one point of view, that of Chairman Mao; but Godard shows, without insulting anyone's intelligence, how chimerical and inadequate to reality (and yet how appealing) this hope actually is. For all his native tendency to sympathize with the most radical view, Godard himself still appears a partisan of that other cultural revolution, ours, which enjoins the artist-thinker to maintain a multiplicity of points of view on any material.

All the devices he uses to keep shifting the point of view within a film themselves contribute to a larger strategy of overlaying a number of narrative voices, whereby Godard appears to bridge the difference between first-person and third-person narration. Thus *Alphaville* opens with three samples of first-person discourse: first, a prefatory statement spoken off-camera by Godard; then a declaration by the computer-ruler Alpha 60; and only then the usual soliloquizing voice, that of the secret-agent hero, shown grimly driving his big car into the city of the future. Instead of, or in addition to, using "titles" between scenes as narrative signals (for example, *My Life to Live, A Married Woman)* Godard seems now more likely to install a narrating voice in the film. This voice may belong to the main character: Bruno's musings in *Le Petit Soldat,* Charlotte's free-associating subtext in *A Married Woman,* Paul's commentary in *Masculine Feminine.* It may be the director's, as in *Band of Outsiders* and "Le Grand Escroc," the sketch from *Les Plus Belles Escroqueries du Monde.* What's most interesting is when there are two voices: as in *Deux ou Trois Choses,* throughout which both Godard (whispering) and the heroine comment on the action. *Band of Outsiders* introduces the notion of a narrative intelligence which can "open a parenthesis" in the action and directly address the audience, explaining what Franz, Odile and Arthur are really feeling at that moment; the narrator can intervene or comment ironically on the action or on the very fact of seeing a movie. (Fifteen minutes into the film, Godard off-camera says, "For the latecomers, what's happened so far is. . . .") Thereby two different but concurrent times are established in the film — the time of the action shown, and the time of the narrator's reflection on what's shown — in a way which

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allows free passage back and forth between the first-person narration and the third-person pre ntation of the action.

Although the narrat g voice already has a major role in some of his earliest work (for ir tance, the virtuoso comic monologue of the last of the pre-*Breathless* horts, *Une Histoire d'Eau*), Godard continues to extend and complicat the task of oral narration, arriving at such recent refinements as th beginning of *Deux ou Trois Choses,* when Godard off-camera first ntroduces his leading actress, Marina Vlady, by name and then describes her as the character she will play. Such procedures tend, of course, to reinforce the self-reflexive and self-referring aspect of Godard's films, for the ultimate narrative presence is simply the fact of cinema itself; from which it follows that, for the sake of truth, the cinematic medium must be made to manifest itself before the spectator. Godard's methods for doing this range from the simple ploy of having an actor make rapid playful asides to the camera (i.e., to the audience) in mid-action, which happens in many of his films, to the aggressive devices in *La Chinoise* such as flashing the claque on the screen from time to time, or briefly cutting to Raoul Coutard, the cameraman on this as on most of Godard's films, seated behind his apparatus. But then one immediately thinks of some underling holding another claque while that scene was shot, of someone else who had to be there behind another camera to photograph Coutard. It's impossible ever to penetrate behind the final veil and experience cinema unmediated by cinema.

But perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Godard proposes a new conception of point of view, thereby staking out the possibility of making films in the first person. By this, I don't mean simply that his films are subjective or personal, like those of many other directors, particularly in the cinematic avant-garde and underground, but something stricter and more original — namely, the way in which Godard, especially in his recent films, has built up a narrative presence, that of the film-maker, who is the central *structural* element in the cinematic narrative. This first-person film-maker isn't an actual character within the film. That is, he isn't to be seen on the screen (except in the episode in *Far From Vietnam,* which shows only Godard at a camera talking), though he is to be heard from time to time and one is increasingly aware of his presence just off-camera. But neither is this off-screen persona a lucid, authorial intelligence, like the detached observer-figure of many novels cast in the first person. The ultimate first person in Godard's movies, his particular version of the film-maker, is the person responsible for the film who yet stands outside

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it as a mind beset by more complex, fluctuating concerns than any single film can represent or incarnate. The most profound drama of a Godard film arises from the clash between this restless, wider consciousness of the director and the determinate, limited argument of the particular film he's engaged in making. Therefore each film is, simultaneously, a creative activity and a destructive one. The director virtually uses up his models, his sources, his themes, his ideas, his latest moral and artistic enthusiasms — and the shape of the film consists of various means for letting the audience know that's what is happening. This dialectic has reached its furthest development so far in *Deux ou Trois Choses,* which is more ambitiously a "first-person film" than any Godard has made.

The advantage of the first-person mode for cinema is presumably that it vastly augments the liberty of the film-maker while at the same time providing incentives for greater formal rigor — the same pair of goals espoused by all the serious post-novelists of this century. Thus Gide has Edouard, the author-protagonist of *The Counterfeiters,* condemn all previous novels because their contours are "defined," so that, however perfect, what they must contain is "captive and lifeless." He wanted to write a novel that would "run freely" because he had chosen "not to foresee its windings." But the liberation of the novel turned out to consist in writing a novel about writing a novel: presenting "literature" within literature. In a different context, Brecht discovered "theater" within theater. Godard has discovered "cinema" within cinema. However loose or spontaneous-looking or personally self-expressive his films may appear, what must be appreciated is that Godard has subscribed to a severely alienated conception of his art: a cinema that eats cinema. Each film is an ambiguous event that must be simultaneously promulgated and destroyed. Godard's most explicit statement of this theme is the painful monologue of self-interrogation which was his contribution to *Far From Vietnam.* Perhaps his wittiest statement of this theme is a scene in *Les Carabiniers* (similar to the end of an early Mack Sennett two-reeler, *Mabel's Dramatic Career)* in which Michelangelo takes time off from the war to visit a movie theater, apparently for the first time, since his reaction resembles that of audiences sixty years ago when movies first began to be shown. He follows the movements of the actors on the screen with his whole body, ducks under the seat when a train appears, and at last, driven wild by the sight of a girl taking a bath in the film within a film, bolts from his seat and rushes up to the stage. After first standing on tiptoe to try to look into the tub, then feeling tentatively for the girl along the

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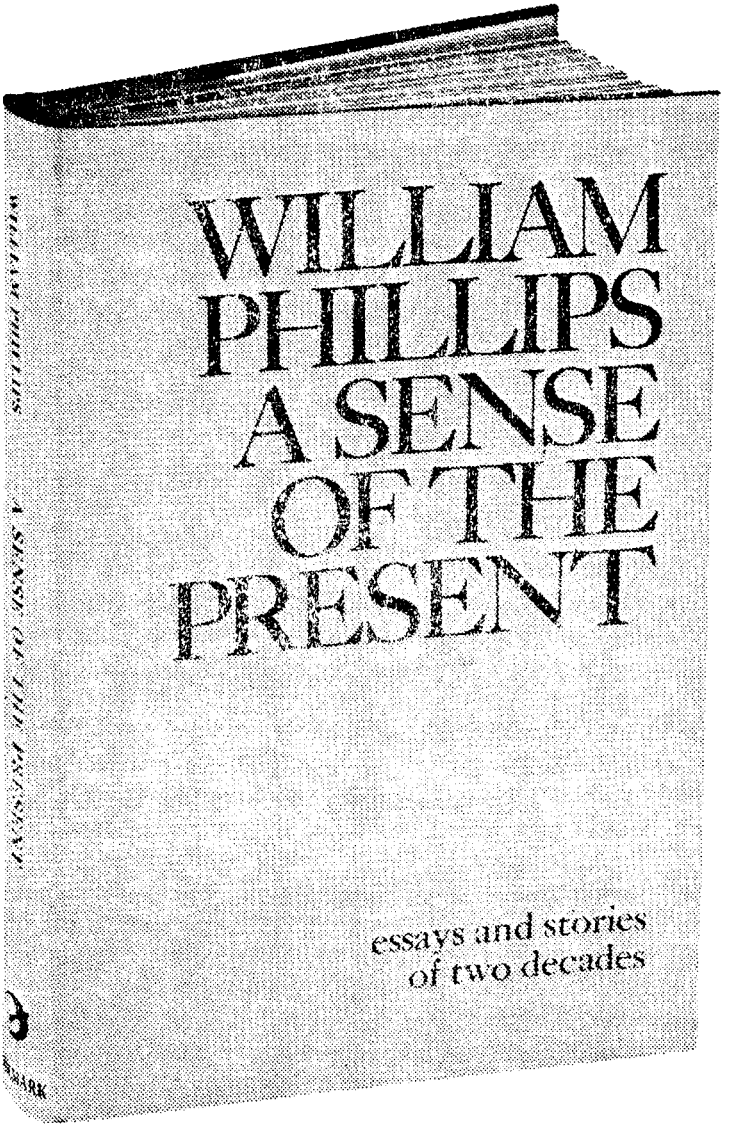


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surface of the screen, he finally tries to grab her — ripping away part of the screen within the screen, and revealing the girl and the bathroom to be a projection on a filthy wall.

Though all of Godard's distinctive devices serve the fundamental aim of breaking up the narrative or varying the perspective, he doesn't aim at a systematic variation of points of view. Sometimes, to be sure, Godard does elaborate a strong plastic conception — like the intricate visual patterns of the couplings of Charlotte with her lover and her husband in *A Married Woman;* and the brilliant formal metaphor of the monochromatic photography in three "political colors" in *Anticipation.* Still, Godard's work characteristically lacks formal rigor. The jump-cuts in *Breathless,* for instance, are not of any strict overall rhythmic scheme, an observation that's confirmed by Godard's account of their rationale. "I discovered in *Breathless* that when a discussion between two people became boring and tedious one could just as well cut between the speeches. I tried it once, and it went very well, so I did the same thing right through the film." Godard may be exaggerating the casualness of his attitude in the cutting room, but his reliance upon intuition on the set is well-known. For no film has a full shooting script been prepared in advance, and many films have been improvised day by day throughout large parts of the shooting; in the recent films shot with direct sound, Godard has the actors wear tiny earphones so that while they are on camera he can speak to each of them privately, feeding them lines or posing questions which they're to answer (direct-to-camera interviews).

From Godard's penchant for improvisation, for incorporating accidents and for location shooting, one might infer a lineage from the neo-realist aesthetic made famous by Italian films of the last twenty-five years, starting with Visconti's *Ossessione* and *La Terra Trema* and reaching its apogee in the postwar films of Rossellini and the recent debut of Olmi. But Godard, although a fervent admirer of Rossellini, is not even a neo-neorealist, and is far from aiming to expel the artifice from art. What he seeks is to conflate the traditional polarities of spontaneous mobile thinking and finished work, of the casual jotting and the fully premeditated statement. Spontaneity, casualness, lifelikeness are not values in themselves for Godard, who is interested rather in the *convergence* of spontaneity with the emotional discipline of abstraction (the dissolution of "subject matter"). The results are, needless to say, far from tidy. Although Godard achieved the basis of his distinctive style very quickly (by 1958), the restlessness of his temperament and his

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evident intellectual voracity impel him to adopt an essentially exploratory posture in relation to film-making, in which he may answer a problem raised but not resolved in one film by starting on another. Still, viewed as a whole, Godard's work is much closer in problems and scope to a radical purist and formalist in film like Bresson than to the neorealists — even though the relation with Bresson must be drawn largely in terms of contrasts.

Bresson also achieved his mature style very quickly, but his career has throughout consisted of thoroughly premeditated, independent works conceived within the limits of his personal aesthetic of concision and intensity. (Born in 1910, Bresson has made eight feature films, the first in 1943 and the most recent in 1967.) Bresson's art is characterized by a pure, lyric quality, by a naturally elevated tone and by a carefully constructed unity. He has said, in an interview conducted by Godard (*Cahiers du Cinéma* ♯178, May, 1966), that for him "improvisation is at the base of creation in the cinema." But the look of a Bresson film is surely the antithesis of improvisation. In the finished film, a shot must be both autonomous and necessary; which means that there's only one ideally correct way of composing each shot (though it may be arrived at quite intuitively) and of editing the shots into a narrative. For all their great energy, Bresson's films project an air of formal deliberateness, of having been organized according to a relentless, subtly calculated rhythm which required their having had everything inessential cut from them. Given his austere aesthetic, it seems apt that Bresson's characteristic subject is a person either literally imprisoned or locked within an excruciating dilemma. Indeed, if one does accept narrative and tonal unity as a primary standard for film, Bresson's asceticism — his maximal use of minimal materials, the meditative "closed" quality of his films — seems to be the only truly rigorous procedure.

Godard's work exemplifies an aesthetic (and, no doubt, a temperament and sensibility) the opposite of Bresson's. The moral energy informing Godard's film-making, while no less powerful than Bresson's, leads to a quite different asceticism: the labor of endless self-questioning, which becomes a constitutive element in the art work. "More and more with each film," he said in 1965, "it seems to me the greatest problem in filming is to decide where and why to begin a shot and why to end it." The point is that Godard cannot envisage anything but arbitrary solutions to his problem. While each shot is autonomous, no amount of thinking can make it necessary. Since film for Godard is preeminently an open structure, the distinction between what's essential and inessential in any given film becomes senseless. Just as no absolute, immanent

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standards can be discovered for determining the composition, duration and place of a shot, there can be no truly sound reason for excluding anything from a film. This view of film as an assemblage rather than a unity lies behind the seemingly facile characterizations Godard has made of many of his recent films. "*Pierrot le Fou* isn't really a film, it's an attempt at cinema." About *Deux ou Trois Choses:* "In sum, it's not a film, it's an attempt at a film and is presented as such." *A Married Woman* is described in the main titles: "Fragments of a Film Shot in 1964" and *La Chinoise* is subtitled "A Film in the Process of Being Made." In claiming to be offering no more than "efforts" or "attempts," Godard acknowledges the structural openness or arbitrariness of his work. Each film remains a fragment in the sense that its possibilities of elaboration can never be used up. For granted the acceptability, even desirability, of the method of juxtaposition ("I prefer simply putting things side by side") which assembles contrary elements without reconciling them, there can indeed be no internally necessary end to a Godard film, as there is to a film of Bresson. Every film must either seem broken off abruptly or else ended arbitrarily — often by the violent death in the last reel of one or more of the main characters, as in *Breathless, Le Petit Soldat, My Life to Live, Les Carabiniers, Contempt, Masculine Feminine* and *Pierrot le Fou.*

Predictably, Godard has supported his views by pressing the relationship (rather than the disjunction) between "art" and "life." Godard claims never to have had the feeling as he worked, which he thinks a novelist must have, "that I am differentiating between life and creation." Or the familiar mythical terrain is claimed once again: "the cinema is somewhere between art and life." Of *Pierrot le Fou,* Godard has written: "Life is the subject, with Scope and color as its attributes . . . . Life on its own as I would like to capture it, using pan shots on nature, *plans fixes* on death, brief shots, long takes, soft and loud sounds, the movements of Anna and Jean-Paul. In short, life filling the screen as a tap fills a bathtub that is simultaneously emptying at the same rate." This, Godard claims, is how he differs from Bresson, who, when shooting a film, has "an idea of the world" that he is "trying to put on the screen or, which comes to the same thing, an idea of the cinema" he's trying "to apply to the world." For a director like Bresson, "cinema and the world are moulds to be filled, while in *Pierrot* there is neither mould nor matter."

Of course Godard's films aren't bathtubs; and Godard harbors his complex sentiments about the world and his art to the same extent and in pretty much the same way as Bresson does. But despite Godard's

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lapse into a disingenuous rhetoric, the contrast with Bresson stands. For Bresson, who was originally a painter, it is the austerity and rigor of cinematic means which make this art (though very few movies) valuable to him. For Godard, it's the fact that cinema is so loose, promiscuous and accommodating a medium which gives movies, even many inferior ones, their authority and promise. Specifically, this fact is what gives film the decisive advantage over literature in the quest for a truly spontaneous or discovered form such as Edouard envisages for the novel in *The Counterfeiters*. Film can mix forms, techniques, points of view; it can't be identified with any single leading ingredient. Indeed, precisely what the film-maker must show is that nothing is excluded. "One can put everything in a film," says Godard. "One must put everything in a film."

A film is conceived of as a living organism: not so much an object as a presence or an encounter — a fully historical or contemporary event, whose destiny it is to be transcended by future events. Seeking to create a cinema which inhabits the real present, Godard regularly puts in his films references to current political crises: Algeria, de Gaulle's domestic politics, Angola, the Vietnam war. (Each of his last four features includes a scene in which the main characters denounce American aggression in Vietnam, and Godard has declared that until that war ends he'll put such a sequence into every film he makes.) The films may include even more casual references and off-the-cuff sentiments — a dig at André Malraux; a compliment to Henri Langlois, director of the Cinemathèque Française; an attack on irresponsible projectionists who show 1:66 films in CinemaScope ratio; or a plug for the unreleased movie of a fellow-director and friend. Godard welcomes the opportunity to use the cinema topically, "journalistically." As photography, cinema has always been an art which recorded temporality; but up to now this has been an inadvertent aspect of feature fiction films. Godard is the first major director who deliberately incorporates certain contingent aspects of the particular social moment at which he's making a film — sometimes making these the frame of the film.

Unworried by the issue of impurity — there are no materials unusable for film — Godard is, nevertheless, involved in an extremely purist venture: the attempt to devise a structure for films which speaks in a purer present tense. His effort is to make movies which live in the actual present, and not to tell something from the past, relate something that's already taken place. In this project, of course, Godard is following a direction already taken in literature. Fiction, until recently, was the art of the past. Events told in an epic or novel are, when the

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reader starts the book, already (as it were) in the past. But in much of the new fiction, events pass before us as if in a present coexisting with the time of the narrative voice (more accurately, with the time in which the reader is being addressed by the narrative voice). Events exist, therefore, in the present — at least as much of the present that the reader himself inhabits. It is for this reason that such writers as Beckett, Stein, Burroughs and Robbe-Grillet prefer to use an actual present tense, or its equivalent. (Another strategy: to make the distinction between past, present and future time within the narration an explicit conundrum, and an insoluble one — as, for example, in some of the tales of Borges and Landolfi and in *Pale Fire.*) But if the development is feasible for literature, it would seem even more apt for film to make a comparable move since, in a way, film narration knows *only* the present tense. (Everything shown is equally present, no matter when it is "said" to have taken place.) What was necessary for film to exploit its natural liberty was to have a much looser, less literal attachment to telling a "story." A story in the traditional sense — something that's already taken place — is replaced by a segmented situation in which the suppression of certain explicative connections between scenes creates the impression of an action continually beginning anew, unfolding in the present tense.

And, of necessity, I should argue, this present tense must appear as a somewhat behaviorist, external, antipsychological view of the human situation. For psychological understanding depends on holding in mind simultaneously the dimensions of past, present and future. To see someone psychologically is to lay out temporal coordinates in which he is situated. An art which aims at the present tense cannot aspire to this kind of "depth" or innerness in the portrayal of human beings. The lesson is already clear from the work of Stein and Beckett; Godard demonstrates it for film.

Godard explicitly alludes to this choice only once, in connection with *My Life to Live* which, he says, he "built . . . in tableaux to accentuate the theatrical side of the film. Besides, this division corresponded to the external view of things which best allowed me to give a feeling of what was going on inside. In other words, a contrary procedure to that used by Bresson in *Pickpocket,* in which the drama is seen from within. How can one render the 'inside'? I think, by staying prudently outside." But though there are obvious advantages to staying "outside" — flexibility of form, freedom from superimposed limiting solutions — the choice is not as clear-cut as Godard suggests. Perhaps one never goes "inside" in the sense Godard attributes to Bresson — a

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procedure already considerably different from the reading-off of motives and summing-up of a character's interior life promoted by nineteenth-century novelistic realism. Indeed, by those standards, Bresson is himself considerably "outside" his characters; for instance, more involved in their somatic presence, the rhythm of their movements, the heavy weight of inexpressible feeling which they bear.

*Still, Godard is right in saying that, compared with Bresson, he is* "outside." One way he stays outside is by constantly shifting the point of view from which the film is told, by the juxtaposition of contrasting narrative elements: realistic alongside implausible aspects of the story, written signs interposed between images, anecdotes or "texts" recited aloud interrupting dialogue, static interviews as against rapid actions, interpolation of a narrator's voice explaining or commenting on the action and so forth. A second way is by his rendering of "things" in a strenuously neutralized fashion, in contrast with Bresson's thoroughly intimate vision of things as objects used, disputed, loved, ignored and worn out by people. Things in Bresson's films, whether a spoon, a chair, a piece of bread, a pair of shoes, are always marked by their human use. The point is *how* they are used — whether skillfully (as the prisoner uses his spoon in *Un Condamné à Mort* and the heroine of *Mouchette* uses the saucepan and bowls to make breakfast coffee) or clumsily. In Godard's films, things display a wholly alienated character. Characteristically, they are used with indifference, neither skillfully nor clumsily; they are simply there. Godard has written: "Objects exist, and if one pays more attention to them than to people, it is precisely because they exist more than these people. Dead objects are still alive. Living people are often already dead." Whether things are the occasion for visual gags (like the suspended egg in *A Woman Is a Woman,* and the movie billboards in the warehouse in *Made in U.S.A.)* or introduce an element of great plastic beauty (as do the Pongeist studies in *Deux ou Trois Choses* of the burning end of a cigarette and of bubbles separating and coming together on the surface of a hot cup of coffee), they always occur in a context of, and serve to reinforce, emotional dissociation. The most noticeable form of Godard's dissociated rendering of things is his ambivalent immersion in the allure of pop imagery and only partly ironic display of the symbolic currency of urban capitalism — pinball machines, boxes of detergent, fast cars, neon signs, billboards, fashion magazines. By extension, this fascination with alienated things dictates the settings of most of Godard's films: highways, airports, anonymous hotel rooms or soulless modern apartments, brightly-lit modernized cafes, movie theaters. The furniture and settings of Godard's

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films is the landscape of alienation — whether he is displaying the pathos in the mundane facticity of the actual life of dislocated, urban persons such as petty hoodlums, discontented housewives, left-wing students, prostitutes (the everyday present) or presenting antiutopian fantasies about the cruel future.

A universe experienced as fundamentally dehumanized or dissociated is also one conducive to rapid "associating" from one ingredient in it to another. Again, the contrast can be made with Bresson's attitude, which is rigorously nonassociative, and therefore concerned with the depth in any situation; in a Bresson film there are certain organically derived and mutually relevant exchanges of personal energy that flourish or exhaust themselves (either way, unifying the narrative and supplying it with an organic terminus). For Godard, there are no genuinely organic connections. In the universe of pain, only three strictly unrelated responses of real interest are possible: violent action, the probe of "ideas" and the transcendence of sudden, arbitrary, romantic love. But each of these possibilities is understood to be revocable, or artificial. They are not acts of personal fulfillment; not so much solutions as dissolutions of a problem. It has been noted that many of Godard's films project a masochistic view of women, verging on misogyny, and

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an indefatigable romanticism about "the couple." It's an odd but rather familiar combination of attitudes. Such contradictions are psychological or ethical analogues to Godard's fundamental formal presuppositions. In work conceived of as open-ended, associative, composed of "fragments," constructed by the (partly aleatoric) juxtaposition of contrary elements, any principle of action or any decisive emotional resolution is bound to be an artifice (from an ethical point of view) or ambivalent (from a psychological point of view).

Each film is a provisional network of emotional and intellectual impasses. With the probable exception of his view on Vietnam, there is no attitude Godard incorporates in his films that is not simultaneously being bracketed, and therefore criticized, by a dramatization of the gap between the elegance and seductiveness of ideas and the brutish or lyrical opaqueness of the human condition. The same sense of impasse characterizes Godard's moral judgments. For all the use made of the metaphor and fact of prostitution to sum up contemporary miseries, Godard's films are not "against" prostitution and "for" pleasure and liberty in the unequivocal sense that Bresson's films directly extol love, honesty, courage and dignity and deplore cruelty and cowardice.

From Godard's perspective, Bresson's work is bound to appear "rhetorical," whereas Godard is bent on destroying rhetoric by a lavish use of irony — the familiar outcome when a restless, somewhat dissociated intelligence struggles to cancel an irrepressible romanticism and tendency to moralize. In many of his films Godard deliberately seeks the framework of parody, of irony as contradiction. For instance, *A Woman Is a Woman* proceeds by putting an ostensibly serious theme (a woman frustrated both as wife and as would-be mother) in an ironically sentimental framework. "The subject of *A Woman Is a Woman,*" Godard has said, "is a character who succeeds in resolving a certain situation, but I conceived this subject within the framework of a neo-realistic musical: an *absolute contradiction,* but that was precisely why I wanted to make the film." Another example is the lyrical treatment of a rather nasty scheme of amateur gangsterism in *Band of Outsiders,* complete with the high irony of the "happy ending" in which Odile sails away with Franz to Latin America for further, romantic adventures. Another example: the nomenclature of *Alphaville,* a film in which Godard takes up some of his most serious themes, is a collection of comic strip identities (characters have names like Lemmy Caution, the hero of a famous series of French thrillers; Harry Dickson; Professor Leonard Nosferatu, alias Von Braun; Professor Jeckyll) and the lead is played by Eddie Constantine, the expatriate American actor whose mug has been a cliché

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of "B" French detective films for two decades; indeed, Godard's original title for the film was *Tarzan versus IBM*. Still another example: the film Godard decided to make on the double theme of the Ben Barka and Kennedy murders, *Made in U.S.A.*, was conceived as a parodic remake of *The Big Sleep* (which had been revived at an art house in Paris in the summer of 1966), with Bogart's role of the trench-coated detective embroiled in an insoluble mystery now played by Anna Karina. The danger of such lavish use of irony is that ideas will be expressed at their point of self-caricature, and emotions only when they are mutilated. Irony intensifies what is already a considerable limitation on the emotions in the films that results from the insistence on the pure presentness of cinema narration, in which situations with less deep affect will be disproportionately represented — the expense of vividly depicted states of grief, rage, profound erotic longing and fulfillment, and physical pain. Thus, while Bresson, at his almost unvarying best, is able to convey deep emotions without ever being sentimental, Godard, at his less effective, devises turns of plot that appear either hardhearted or sentimental (at the same time seeming emotionally flat).

Godard "straight" seems to me more successful — whether in the rare pathos he has allowed in *Masculine Feminine,* or in the hard coolness of such directly passionate films as *Les Carabiniers, Contempt* and *Pierrot le Fou.* This coolness is a pervasive quality of Godard's work. Strikingly, for all their violence of incident and sexual matter-of-factness, the films have a rather muted, detached relation to the grotesque and painful as well as to the seriously erotic. People are sometimes tortured and often die in Godard's films, but almost casually. (He has a particular predilection for automobile accidents: the end of *Contempt,* the wreck in *Pierrot le Fou,* the landscape of affectless highway carnage in *Weekend.)* And people are rarely shown making love, though if they are, what interests Godard isn't the sensual communion but what sex reveals "about the spaces between people." The orgiastic moments come when young people dance together or sing or play games or run — people run beautifully in Godard movies — not when they make love.

"Cinema is emotion," says Samuel Fuller in *Pierrot le Fou,* and one surmises that Godard shares that thought. But emotion, for Godard, never comes unaccompanied by some decoration of wit, some transmuting of feeling that he clearly puts at the center of the art-making process. This accounts in part for Godard's preoccupation with language — with words both heard and seen on the screen. Language functions as a means of emotional distancing from the action. The pic-

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torial element is emotional, immediate; but words (including signs, texts, stories, sayings, recitations, interviews) have a lower temperature. While images invite the spectator to identify with what is seen, the presence of words makes the spectator into a critic.

But Godard's Brechtian use of language is only one aspect of the phenomenon. Much as Godard owes to Brecht, his treatment of language is far more complex and equivocal; and relates rather to the efforts of certain painters, who use words actively to undermine the image, to refute it, to render it opaque and unintelligible. It's not simply that Godard gives language a place that no other film director has before him. (Compare the verbosity of Godard's films with Bresson's verbal severity and austerity of dialogue.) He sees nothing in the film medium that prevents one of the subjects of cinema from being language itself — as language has become the very subject of much contemporary poetry and, in a metaphoric sense, of some important painting, such as that of Jasper Johns. But it seems likely that language will become the subject of cinema only at that point when a film-maker is obsessed by the problematic character of language — as Godard so evidently is. What other directors have regarded mainly as an adjunct of greater "realism" (the advantage of sound films as compared with silents) becomes in Godard's hands a virtually autonomous, sometimes subversive instrument.

Not only does Godard not regard cinema as essentially moving photographs; on the contrary, precisely the fact that movies, which purport to be a pictorial medium, admit of language being added in is what gives cinema its superior range and freedom compared with other art forms. Pictorial or photographic elements are in a sense only the raw materials of Godard's cinema; the transformative ingredient is the presence of language. Thus, to cavil at Godard for the talkiness of his films is to misunderstand his materials and his intentions. It is almost as if the pictorial image had a static quality, too close to "art," that Godard wants to infect with the blight of words. In *La Chinoise,* a sign on the wall of the student Maoist commune reads: "One must replace vague ideas with clear images." But that's only one side of the matter, as Godard knows. Sometimes images are too clear, too simple. (*La Chinoise* is Godard's sympathetic, witty treatment of the arch-Romantic wish to make oneself entirely simple, altogether clear.) The highly permutated dialectic between image and language is far from stable. As he declares in his own voice at the beginning of *Alphaville*: "Some things in life are too complex for oral transmission. So we make fiction out of them, to make them universal." But again, it's clear that making things uni-

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versal can bring oversimplification, which must be combated by the concreteness and ambiguity of words.

Godard has always been fascinated by the opaqueness and coerciveness of language, and a recurrent feature of the film narratives is some sort of deformation of speech. Complementing these mutilations of speech and language are the many explicit discussions of language as a problem in Godard's films. The puzzle about how it's possible to make moral or intellectual sense by speaking, owing to the betrayal of consciousness by language, is debated in *My Life to Live* and *A Married Woman*; the ambiguities of language, in the mystery of "translating" from one language to another, is a theme in *Contempt* and *Band of Outsiders*; the language of the future is a subject of speculation by Guillaume and Veronique (it is to be altogether different; each word or phrase will be separate) in *La Chinoise*; the nonsensical underside of language is demonstrated in the exchange in the café between Marianne, the laborer and the bartender in *Made in U.S.A.*; and the effort to purify language of philosophical and cultural dissociation is the explicit, main theme of *Alphaville* and *Anticipation,* the success of an individual's efforts to do this providing the dramatic resolution of both films.

At this moment in Godard's work, the problem of language appears to have become his leading motif. Behind their obtrusive verbosity, Godard's films are haunted by the duplicity and banality of language. Insofar as there is a "voice" speaking in all his films, it is one that questions all voices. Language is the widest context in which Godard's recurrent theme of prostitution must be located. Beyond its direct sociological interest for Godard, prostitution is his extended metaphor for the fate of language, that is, of consciousness itself. The coalescing of the two themes is clearest in the science-fiction nightmare of *Anticipation*: in an airport hotel some time in the future (that is, now), travelers have the choice of two kinds of temporary sexual companions, someone who makes bodily love without speaking or someone who can recite the words of love but can't take part in any physical embrace. This schizophrenia of the flesh and the soul is the menace that inspires Godard's preoccupation with language, and confers on him the painful, self-interrogatory terms of his restless art. As Natasha declares at the end of *Alphaville*: "There are words I don't know." But it's that painful knowledge, according to Godard's controlling narrative myth, that marks the beginning of her redemption and — by an extension of the same project — the redemption of art itself.

**Susan Sontag**

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# AN APPEAL

Sirs:

*. . . Negroes in Mississippi are starving, a team of distinguished doctors declared recently—starving in the sense that acute malnutrition shortens their life-span, dying young from an accumulation of hunger-induced diseases that go untreated for years. . . .*

This is a quotation from a news item in the *New York Post* for July 10th, 1967. A later account, in the same paper, tells of Negroes in rural Mississippi areas subsisting partially on grass, and begging for food and/or money at Civil Rights headquarters in their various localities.

This is happening not in impoverished, overpopulated India or China; it is happening not in some economically backward country; it is happening in the United States of America, the richest country on earth.

Boston CORE is naturally concerned with alleviating this terrible situation. Recently, in answer to our letter of inquiry, we received a letter from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare advising us of a new issue of Food Stamps, with greater purchasing power than the old, which the Department is about to launch. Yet such is the poverty of the Negroes in these rural Mississippi areas that they will not be able to buy the new Stamps, cheap though they may be. Therefore, Boston CORE is sponsoring a fund drive, the proceeds of which will go to purchase the new Stamps, for these needy Negroes.

We are calling on your readers to help these poor victims of a grossly unfair and tragic situation. Anyone desiring to help may do so by sending a check to Boston CORE at the following address: 373 Blue Hill Avenue, Roxbury, Mass. 02121.

The situation of these poor people is as terrible as it is undeserved. Will you help?

John Young
Chairman, Boston CORE

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# VARIETY

## THE LAST GENTLEMAN

It was in New York in 1956. I saw Faulkner sitting on a bench in Washington Square Park.

At the short distance his face reminded me of Charlie Chaplin, and the way he was inserted rather than seated on the bench had the touch of a Chaplin comedy. He was flanked by people dozing, reading and lounging in the sunshine; he was a quiet center of great activity as strollers passed closely by and children raced, skated and shouted up and down the concrete path. In all the hubbub and movement he sat quietly, pipe in mouth, clasped hands resting on crossed legs, body hunched slightly forward. His gaze seemed fixed upon something far but particular, although only the massive buildings of NYU lined the outer edge of the park.

Close to where Faulkner was seated several children were teasing a young girl who was learning to skate. As she drew nearer, the skates flew out from under, and she fell heavily on the concrete a few feet from Faulkner's knee. The little girl, who was about ten, and more shocked than hurt by the sudden fall, alternated screams and sobs. Her cheek bled and she clutched one bruised knee as she tried to rise. People rushed toward her; they removed the skates and helped her get up, and one dabbed at her bleeding cheek with a handkerchief. A few minutes later, when she became calm and left the scene, the crowd disappeared.

I had, somehow, kept my eyes on Faulkner during the skating accident, and I realized that all through the incident Faulkner had not moved. He had remained immobile in the noise and movement before and about him. He still sat as fixed and uninvolved as he had been when I first noticed him — hands, legs and pipe seemed as detached as some store-window mannequin. All the anecdotes I had read about Faulkner's drinking — the Hollywood episodes — came flooding back as possible explanations. It was because he didn't *look* drunk that I felt

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compelled to approach him and to try to solve the small mystery. With as much bravado as I could muster, I strolled up casually and spoke to him.

"Hello, Mr. Faulkner."

His eyes flicked up at me quickly and withdrew. He made the barest nod with his head and was silent. Directly in front of me at Faulkner's left was an empty space, and I was hoping that he would ask me to sit down. He didn't. I shifted nervously and was about to say some polite word of goodbye when his eyes snapped up at me again.

"Do you go to college, son? Over there?"

"Yes," I said. "I'm a senior, but not over there — I go to CCNY."

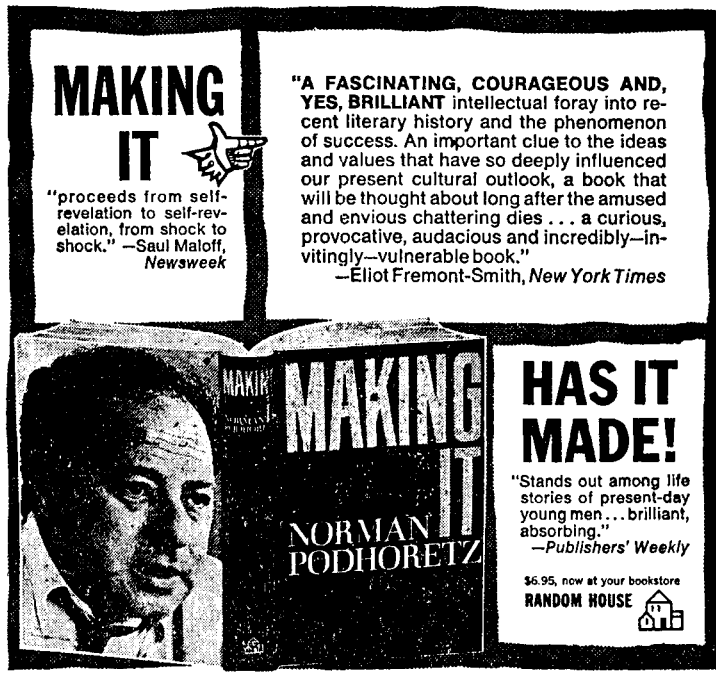
This time his eyes held mine and he repeated the college's name as I had given it. The last letter came out softly and sounded like *wah*.

"I'm an English major," I added. "American literature."

"Oh," Faulkner said softly again. Then, he repeated what I had said last. The word *literature* came out in three syllables and seemed to end *ooh* as he said it to himself. "What's your name?"

"Calvin Israel."

He gave me a puzzled look, repeated my name and smiled. "I'm

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used to that reaction," I said. "When I get to be a teacher I intend to confuse all my students by telling them my middle name is St. Thomas Aquinas."

Faulkner laughed. He tapped the pipe against his palm and placed it in the lapel pocket of his corduroy jacket. He uncrossed his legs and swung his body toward me. "Sit down, son," he said.

We sat facing each other in bright sunlight through which Faulkner squinted as he talked. As he spoke his eyes moved constantly, resting only now and then upon me, but seeming to take in all that went on about us.

"Are you a New Yorker?" Faulkner asked. New Yorker was two syllables.

"Not much longer," I said. "I'm leaving to go to graduate school."

"Plan to teach?"

"I'd like to write, too," I said.

"That's good," Faulkner replied quickly. "What things?"

"Oh . . . ," I said. "I try poems mostly."

"That's good," he said again brightly. "I do those all the time."

"I know," I answered. "I read them. There's only one book, isn't there?"

He plucked the pipe out of the jacket pocket and turned slightly away from me. He fondled the pipe and examined the ground in front of us moodily. I had the feeling that I had said something annoying. For a few moments I searched for a way to engage him again, but he came back himself.

"What do you plan to work on?"

"It's a bit hazy right now," I said. "I'd like to try your books. I like *As I Lay Dying* very much, but it's puzzling — the structure, I mean."

Faulkner nodded. "I like *Dying* — do you know *Light*?"

"*Light*? — oh, you mean *Light in August*? I haven't read that yet, but I had a teacher once who thought it was your best."

"What's his name?" he asked.

"Bird Stair."

"No . . . I don't know of him. How about Tom Wolfe?"

"I haven't thought about Wolfe much," I said. "I like his work, but the only problems I've thought about are in Melville and your books."

"What problems do you have with Bill Faulkner?" he asked.

"I think they're similar to the ones in Melville," I said. "If I had to choose a title right now I'd call it something like *William Faulkner and the Problem of Evil*."

He sat straight up and stared at me. "Evil?" he chuckled. "No . . .

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that seems to fit Melville better than it does Bill Faulkner."

It was clear by now that Faulkner's inaction during the little girl's fall could not be blamed on drinking. I was still puzzled by that detachment, however, and I struggled to find a way to bring it up without bluntness. It was apparent that Faulkner was a very shy and reserved man, and, at that moment at least, preferred many silences to lengthy conversation. His eyes had found the knot of people gathered around a folksinger who was entertaining at the large fountain.

In the previous December, N.B.C. had produced an adaptation of Faulkner's novel, *The Sound and the Fury*. The production had been received poorly by critics, and since I disagreed with their opinions I thought Faulkner might be interested in the reasons.

"By the way, Mr. Faulkner," I began, "I happened to see the TV play of *The Sound and the Fury* a few months ago, and I think the critics were wrong — but they were also right."

His attention returned to me. "Oh," he said, "I've been giving that a lot of thought, too."

"I think," I went on, "if someone who saw the TV play didn't know the book, he would have found the play hard to follow — but if he knew the book, the play was fine."

"I've been thinking some things like that, son," Faulkner said. He lifted the Tyrolean hat and rubbed hard at the hair over his temple. In the sunlight his hair was more iron-grey than the white which appears in such strong contrast to his moustache in photographs. "Durkee's job," he added.

He replaced his hat and watched me light a cigarette. He had shaken his head at my offer of one, and he seemed to be studying the insignificant actions I made in lighting up.

"Well, son," he said, "you seem to be spending too much time thinking about Bill Faulkner. Anything else you want to tell me?"

"There's only one other thing I can think of at this moment, Mr. Faulkner," I answered, "and I'm afraid I disagree with you on that interview in which you made the 'go slow in the South' statement."

"I didn't say *that*," Faulkner said quickly. "You don't — lots of people just don't understand what I said."

He got up suddenly and I stood up also. I was struck by how small he was.

"Violence," he said.

"If you mean, Mr. Faulkner, that the danger is violence, then in my opinion it is worth all the chance."

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"You don't understand, son," he said again. "You can't understand that *kind* of violence." He offered me his hand and I shook it.

"Good luck, son," he said. He was smiling as he started to move away.

"Mr. Faulkner," I said quickly. "That little girl on skates — who fell — did you see her?"

"Yes, son," he said, "I saw her. Goodbye."

I watched him walk to the fountain and stop to listen to the folk-singer. He filled and lighted his pipe and walked around the fountain to cross the street directly in front of the Washington Arch. He stood looking up at the top of the monument, and then, with a playful military bearing, he marched rather than walked through the arch and disappeared in the crowds along lower Fifth Avenue.

**Calvin Israel**

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# CONTEMPORARY NONSENSE

## I.

## VIET NOTES

Lieut. Gen. Lewis B. Hershey, director of Selective Service, on whether a declaration of war against North Vietnam would make his job easier: "I've lived under situations where every decent man declared war first, and I've lived under situations where you don't declare war. We've been flexible enough to kill people without declaring war." (*New York Times*, March 17, 1968)

### AIR FORCE CHIEF CHAPLAIN IN VIETNAM, SEES FIVE NEW CHAPELS

SAIGON — Msgr. (Maj. Gen.) Edwin R. Chess, chief of U.S. Air Force chaplains, has visited the 10 U.S. air bases in Vietnam. . . .

"I know of no more heart-warming experience as chief of chaplains than to participate in the dedication of a new chapel," he said at Phan Rang.

"As long as we as a nation continue to build chapels, wherever we are, for God's glory, as long as we are given a place for our worship. As long as each of us fulfills his obligations as Christian or Jew dedicated to God, we have the assurance that God will be with us," he told the congregation at Tuy Hoa.

Five new chapels have been completed on U.S. air bases in Vietnam since his last visit one year ago.

"No other nation provides chapels such as ours around the world, especially in a war theater," he said. (*NC News Service*, December 2, 1967) Contributed by Martin J. Corbin, Tivoli, N.Y.

### MAJOR DESCRIBES MOVE

BENTRE, February 7 (AP) — "It became necessary to destroy the town to save it," a United States major said today.

He was talking about the decision by allied commanders to bomb and shell the town regardless of civilian casualties, to rout the Vietcong. (*New York Times*, February 8, 1968) Contributed by John Brereton, New Brunswick, N.J., and by Jim Cole, also of New Brunswick, N.J.

The South Vietnamese President, Nguyen Van Thieu . . . was asked about the arrest of two prominent politicians opposed to his Government in Saigon.

"We have just protected them against any kidnapping from the Vietcong," President Thieu said. (*New York Times*, February 26, 1968) Contributed by Nicholas Macdonald, N.Y., N.Y.

EDITORS' NOTE: *We'd like to remind our readers that they're invited to send in examples of Nonsense. A year's free subscription to* PR *will be awarded for each contribution used. In case of ties, single copies will be sent to the latecomers.*

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## HANOI'S MISSION IN PARIS REPEATS OFFER ON TALKS

PARIS, January 4 — The North Vietnamese diplomatic mission repeated today Hanoi's offer to talk with Washington about "relevant problems" provided the Americans "first unconditionally stop bombing and all other acts of war" against North Vietnam.

A statement issued by the mission here refrained from saying that the "relevant problems" included the issue of peace, although the general assumption has been that this would be the case. (*New York Times*, January 5, 1968) Contributed by Deborah Stone, Newton Center, Mass.

## II.

## ARMY PREPARES TO FIGHT "HOT SUMMER" OUTBREAKS

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Army is stockpiling riot control equipment in strategically located depots across the country, officials said today, and is ready to airlift it to any city if civil disorders break out next summer. . . .

Army and National Guard officials said their planning has been extensive as well as diverse, ranging from obtaining maps of subway, sewer, water and electrical systems in potential trouble spots to preparing menus for mobilized National Guardsmen. (The North Carolina guard, for example, will have fish with tartar sauce for dinner on the third day if called out.) (*The New Haven Register*, February 15, 1968) Contributed by Bertrand Mathieu, West Haven, Conn.

## VIEWS ON KEY ISSUES

Archbishop-elect Terence J. Cooke voiced these positions yesterday: . . .

On Spellman: "I will attempt to carry on the work of Cardinal Spellman. But I cannot imagine being all things to all men as he was." (*Daily News*, March 9, 1968)

## TOUR OF BUDDHA'S TOWN DUE

KATMANDU, Nepal (AP) — Lumbini, believed to be the birthplace of Buddha (563-483 B.C.), is to be developed as an international tourist attraction with the help of an expert team from the United Nations. (*New York Times*, February 11, 1968) Contributed by Bruce Cleary, Madison, Conn.

## ASTRONOMERS HEAR SIGNALS FROM SPACE

The observations at Arecibo so far have been on four frequencies. They show the initial pulse to be 50 thousandths of a second long, but in transit the low frequency part is delayed some 10 seconds more than the high frequency part of the pulse. The relative intensities of these components varies with each pulse.

Dr. Drake said that the variations did not display any properties. However, messages between advanced civilizations might be difficult to identify. (*New York Times*, March 10, 1968)

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. . . . Still, I should think that anyone who has ever glanced at *Partisan Review* will sense enough of that group's odd preoccupations, argumentative arrogance and eerie lack of connection with reality to gain pleasure from watching four representative types trying to cope with something as distressingly abstract as death. (Richard Schickel. Review of *"Bye Bye Braverman." Life*, March 15, 1968)

SURPRISE! IT'S A BABY, DAD, YOU TOO, MA

BRIGG, England (AP) — Gordon Dunderdale had 10 children when he fell asleep in front of the television.

When he woke up he had 11 — and he hadn't known his wife was pregnant.

Neither had she.

The eventful night in the life of the Dunderdales started when Gordon, 38, settled down in his favorite chair to watch television. Brenda, 34, went to the kitchen to make coffee.

Gordon fell asleep. Brenda felt unwell. She slipped out of the house to the hospital.

Gordon . . . called police, who traced Brenda to Glenford Hospital. . . .

"I felt an awful fool," said Gordon. (*Chicago American*, December 23, 1967) Contributed by Ellen Siegel, Chicago, Ill.

'LITURGICAL ARTS' OFFERS DESIGN
FOR A CHAPEL ON THE MOON

"The whole thing is hypothetical of course," said Maurice Lavanoux, the managing editor, "although I spoke to the people at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and they didn't seem to think that it was too far out." (*National Catholic Reporter*, December 20, 1967) Contributed by Mrs. Carole McCauley, Greenwich, Conn.

ODHAMS TO MERGE 'POW!' AND 'WHAM!'

Odhams Press will merge two of their juvenile publications, *Pow!* and *Wham!*, starting with the January 20 issue on sale Monday, January 15. The new title will be *Pow! and Wham!*, and the selling price will remain unchanged at 7d. (*Advertiser's Weekly* (London), December 22, 1967) Contributed by A. Oakley, Cheltenham, England.

COLLEGE BARS HIPPIES

BROWNWOOD, Tex., February 9 (AP) — Howard Payne College announced today a policy barring "hippies and other bizarre personalities" from enrollment. The Baptist-supported institution said those who were not hippies when they enrolled but became so later "will be asked either to change their ways or to withdraw." Howard Payne has an enrollment of about 1,250. (*New York Times*, February 10, 1968) Contributed by Joseph A. Barbato, Woodside, N.Y.

PUBLIC PETTING BAN IN K.U. DORM
RESULTS IN "LIGHTS ON" THREAT

"After all, [the Dean said] when residents cannot watch television because some couples sitting in the lounge are being somewhat amorous, it's time something was done." (*The Kansas City Star*, December 10, 1967) Contributed by Thomas F. Barrow, Rochester, N.Y.

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## LETTERS

### FREUDIAN SLIP

Sirs:

In his article, "Dreamers" (*Partisan Review,* Summer 1967, p. 345), Leslie Fiedler states that "Joseph, however, Freud does not ever mention." In *The Interpretation of Dreams,* however, the following footnote appears:

> It will be noticed that the name of Josef plays a great part in my dreams (cf. the dream about my uncle [pp. 171 ff.]). My own ego finds it very easy to hide itself behind people of that name, since Joseph was the name of a man famous in the Bible as an interpreter of dreams. (Avon edition, 1965, p. 522.)

Freud, therefore, not only mentions the biblical Joseph, but points to the frequency of the name in his dreams, to his own frequent identification with the figure, and to the main fact that the grounds of identification are their like capacities to interpret dreams.

David Bleich

Mr. Fiedler replies:

Thanks.


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*(Continued from page 174)*

white Southerner and a freelance writer specializing in social problems. His most recent book, **To Change a Child,** is about early childhood education. . . . **STEPHAN THERNSTROM,** Associate Professor of History at Brandeis, is an associate of the M.I.T.-Harvard Joint Center for Urban Studies. . . . **DR. NATHAN WRIGHT, JR.** served as chairman of the 1967 National Conference on Black Power. His **Ready to Riot** came out this year. . . . **WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD's** volume on Wyndham Lewis will be published this spring in the Twayne English Authors Series. . . . **ALAN DUGAN** is poet-in-residence at Sarah Lawrence this year. . . . **IRVING FELDMAN** is at Buffalo and **JOHN A. WILLIAMS** is at Harvard. . . . **RICHARD GILMAN** has recently become literary editor of the **New Republic**, after many years as drama critic for **Commonweal** and **Newsweek.** After seeing some seven or eight hundred stage works during that time, he says, he is convinced that the traditional, accepted theater is no place for a civilized man to spend his time. . . . **SUSAN SONTAG's** essay is an abridged version of a longer study of Godard to be included in her new collection of essays, which will be published this fall by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. . . . **CALVIN ISRAEL** is at U.C.L.A.

We're not running reviews in this issue, for lack of space. There will be an expanded BOOKS section in the Summer number.

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